THE EXPERIENCE OF COUNSELLOR TRAINEES
FROM NON-WESTERN CULTURES

By

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ABSTRACT

Following a qualitative research frame, this study used a case study approach to describe and understand the life career experience of counsellor trainees' from Non-Western Culture (NWC). An ethnographic or in-depth interview methodology was utilized to acquire narrative data that was re-written as an analytical description of this particular experience. Eight NWC counsellor trainees who were studying in a Canadian university, and who were originally from countries in Asia, Africa, and South America, participated in this study. The interviews became the primary source of information upon which an individual story was developed. After being validated by the respective participants/informants, the major themes highlighting the turning points and critical plots of the eight individual narratives were synthesized into a general narrative. This general narrative reflected both the commonly-shared and varied experiences and perspectives of these individuals during the transition period.

Becoming engaged in counsellor training was not an event, but rather a process over time which often started when the NWC trainees seriously considered the need for change in their lives. They defined their options, and decided to either immigrate to, or study in Canada. They then took concrete action to implement their plans.

The NWC trainees endeavoured to make an initial adjustment after coming to Canada. Most of them coped with many issues and challenges in adapting to the sociocultural environment of the host country, while searching for the best life
career direction. Acquiring counsellor training appeared to be a viable career path and they actively pursued this new career option.

The concluding part of the narrative described the NWC trainees' engagement in professional training in counselling psychology and counsellor education. The trainees were committed to this new career goal, aiming at graduate level training. They dealt with a series of emerging issues and challenges including English language difficulty, adjustment to the new educational system, and other dynamics in the training process. The trainees also had to cope with issues such as family and financial concerns. These issues interacted with their academic and professional training. Having gained a sense of personal growth, the trainees found their involvement in counselling training both challenging and inspiring. Not only did their training provide them with a deep experience of self-exploration and self-understanding, it also helped them project their future career plans.

This study generated several theoretical implications. It supported the three broadly-defined theoretical perspectives of career development, i.e., career as life process, career as individual agency, and career as meaning making. The study also echoed the three major constructs that compose the transition of adult learners' lives when they return to universities for continuing education. These three aspects included identity negotiation, social connectedness, and academic competence. With regard to cross-cultural adjustment, the study offered some support for the common factors affecting NWC students' cross-cultural
adjustment in colleges and universities in North America but also was at variance with some of the literature regarding the problem of racism and prejudice.

The implications for practice focused on a comprehensive helping approach addressing both the psychological and the tangible needs of NWC counsellor trainees. Aiming at building a positive and supportive learning climate, such implications included the need to enhance the trainees' personal agency, to avoid failure of communication, to use constructive feedback, to understand and address special needs, and to remain open and flexible while training and supervising NWC trainees.

Several implications for future research were discussed. They included consideration of the relevance of the narrative approach in related studies, as well as an exploration of the broader applicability and representativeness of the evidence presented in the current study.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Topic and Overview

This study, which adopts an in-depth interview method, is intended to investigate the experience of people from non-Western cultures (NWC) pursuing the counselling profession in Canada. The term counselling profession in this study includes occupations of counselling psychologist, psychotherapist, counsellor, and guidance worker in private practice as well as in institutional settings.

What happens to persons with non-Western cultural backgrounds when they pursue and enter counselling training in mainstream Western society? How do they make the decision to pursue such types of professional training? What are their experiences in such endeavours? How do they cope with various new challenges along the way? What are their career paths? Given their special experiences of acculturation, what meaning does the life career transition to the counselling profession have for them?

As NWC persons start to pursue a career in counselling and psychotherapy, their cross-cultural experience poses a unique and pertinent aspect for the present study to investigate. This study attempts to describe and interpret such a unique experience so that it will be better understood by both NWC persons themselves and those involved in higher education. To conform with this purpose and to answer the questions in the previous paragraph, this study addresses the question: "How can the experience of counsellor trainees with non-Western cultural backgrounds (NWC Counsellor trainees) be described and understood?"

This research topic combines a number of issues. According to Super (1990) and
others (for example, Amundson & Poehnell, 1996; Erikson, 1982; Gottfredson, 1996; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995), student life is an important part of one's total life career pathway. The pivotal impact of this particular experience on people's career development, therefore, is worth noting. Reciprocally, the students' coping experience in higher education is entangled with, and characterized by, many psychological and sociological factors such as self-concept, self-efficacy, socioeconomic changes, and person-environment interaction in people's career development process (Amundson, 1995a; Betz, 1992; Gottfredson, 1985; Super, 1981).

Further, NWC students' experience in this process is linked with cross-cultural adjustment which reflects and describes the related dynamics and factors within a cross-cultural context. The interplay of variables in these three domains, namely, career development, transition to higher education, and cross-cultural adjustment, displays a meaningful picture of NWC counsellor trainees' journey of career construction. To understand NWC counsellor trainees' experience is to look at the interactive and interweaving nature of these various facets in a career-making process which is heuristic to adult students' career change and transition in general, and relevant to NWC adult students' coping and transition in particular. Thus, it is the goal of the present study to unveil this coping process.

To pursue this research objective it is pivotal to focus on a reflexive process which takes into account how people think, feel, and perceive the experience they have encountered. To achieve this end it is important to not only describe human experiences, but to also make sense of these experiences. The inquiry aims at the threshold of a meaning
making mission. It is about the researcher and the research participants/informants working together in a search for meaning from these experiences, and furthermore, to interpret meaning from the experiences in such a way that is not only meaningful to the participants but also informative to the general public.

Such a research objective calls for a methodological approach that parallels its research philosophy. An ethnographic research frame tends to better accommodate this research intent. Within the general domain of qualitative research, ethnographic research does not focus on predicting but rather focuses on understanding human experiences (Agar, 1986). As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out, a major value of the ethnographic research framework rests on its capacity to describe the activities and perspectives of actors who are involved in the action process; ethnography challenges many of the misleading preconceptions that social scientists bring to the research process.

Adopting the ethnographic frame has a twofold relevance toward the present study. First, it conforms with what the research is intended for, that is, to describe and comprehend people's experiences. As such, the research approach is expected to facilitate rather than hinder the research purpose. Second, the research process itself will be of assistance in reducing possible biases from the researcher. The research work will closely reflect the experiences of the participants. Ethnography is interested in letting people have the opportunity to revisit their subjective experiences in depth. Meaningful interpretation of these experiences occurs as the researcher and the participants work jointly to negotiate descriptions (Sullivan, 1984). Consequently, meanings that are truly meaningful to the participants will be rendered from this reflexive process of critical analysis.
This study will use transcripts generated from in-depth, phenomenological interviews as the primary source of information for analysis. NWC counsellor trainees who are currently enrolled in, or recently graduated from university and college level counsellor education and/or counselling and guidance programs will be invited to participate in the interviews. The study will also incorporate narrative methodology (see Polkinghorne, 1988; Young & Collin, 1992) for analysis and interpretation of the transcripts. It is anticipated that based on the narratives and the meanings they generate, implications will emerge for both research and practice (e.g., counsellor education, helping people in cross-cultural coping and adjustment).

**Significance and Rationale of the Research**

The relevance of a research plan rests on its potential contributions to knowledge and practice with regard to public good as well as individual well being.

The first and foremost significance of this research undertaking lies in the fact that the study will open a new research domain within the disciplines of cross-cultural adjustment and counsellor education. Based on my research experiences for the past few years (e.g., the availability of related literature that can be found in university libraries, information through internet, frequency and volume of new publications specifically focusing on cross-cultural adjustment, etc.), it is clear that although there has been increasing interest in the area of cross-cultural adjustment, the volume of available literature on the subject is relatively small as compared to other topics in the social sciences and humanities.

In the existing literature, the central attention seems to have been directed to help-seekers/clients who are from non-Western cultures (Mak, Westwood, & Ishiyama, 1994;
Sue & Sue, 1974; Westwood & Ishiyama, 1990, 1991). It is critical to understand that as Canada continues to accept tens of thousands of new immigrants around the world each year, helping these people from different cultures incorporate themselves successfully into the main stream society will remain a challenging and relevant task (McCormick & Paterson, 1996). This reality calls for the enhancement of counselling professionals' sensitivity, knowledge, and skills in working in cross-cultural contexts. Further, it also brings up a significant agenda. That is, we need NWC counsellors to join the helping profession to better reflect the cultural mix of our current community.

When discussing cross-cultural issues in a helping context, the existing literature usually assumes a working relationship between a counselling professional with a Western cultural background and a client from a non-Western culture. Under this traditional hypothesis of "the Western helper working with the NWC client", it is the counselling professional's task to become culturally competent in working with clients from varied cultures (Corey, 1991; Ivey, 1988; Pedersen, 1991a; Sue & Sue, 1990). In other words, the central issue is how counsellors from the Western mainstream culture should increase their competency in cross-cultural counselling situations. While concentration of research and practice given to this end is certainly very appropriate and necessary considering the needs of NWC help-seekers, there seems to be a paucity of literature describing the specific life career pathways for people with a non-Western cultural background who decide to pursue a career as a helping professional.

Parallel to the lack of study regarding issues relevant to NWC helping professionals, there is a scarcity of theoretical and practical knowledge concerning NWC counsellor
trainees' life career experience. As the experience of being a counsellor trainee is the onset of a professional career and/or a critical life career transition point, it becomes a very significant experience to explore.

Despite some commonly perceived generalizations such as learning related anxiety and culture shock the NWC students may encounter, the particular experience of NWC counsellor trainees remains largely unknown. Thus, a unique and original contribution of this study to knowledge in general, and the counselling profession in particular, is its focus on the life career experience of a target population which has rarely been studied by researchers in the area, i.e., the experience of counsellor trainees with non-Western cultural backgrounds.

There are at least three main components that are embodied in the present effort to gain an in-depth understanding of life career experience of NWC counsellor trainees. First, examination of this experience may inform general career development theories from both psychological and sociological vistas. There is little doubt that such an experience combines and illustrates a variety of interwoven psychological and sociological dynamics in one's career pathway.

The NWC counsellor trainees' experience in career decision making and life career transition may be similar to those of counsellor trainees with a main stream Western cultural background. Information rendered from this probe is very likely to integrate and support theories and research in various career-related domains such as life career process (Super, 1990), human agency in life career development (Amundson, 1995a, Amundson & Poehnell, 1996; Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986; Betz, 1992; Betz & Hackett, 1981; Cochran & Laub,

This study is also expected to contribute to the general literature on cross-cultural adjustment and acculturation in life career contexts. NWC counsellor trainees may confront many similar challenges to other newcomers to North America (Ishiyama & Westwood, 1992; Pedersen, 1991a; Sue & Sue, 1990; Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991). Yet, NWC counsellor trainees may encounter some unique adjustment experiences within a very special learning context, i.e., the context of academic and professional training in the discipline of counselling psychology. The nature of the discipline reflects and utilizes primarily helping approaches based on Western philosophical, psychological, economic, and sociocultural frames. It is likely that studying and digesting these helping models in a new learning environment, i.e., Canadian universities and colleges, could generate some special experiences for NWC counsellor trainees as they attempt to make a life career transition in a very different sociocultural context.

This study should be of practical and clinical benefit to the cross-cultural life career adjustment and coping literature in general, and counsellor education for NWC people in particular. It might be reasonably presumed that NWC counsellor trainees have overcome substantial socioeconomic, cultural, and personal difficulties. There is little doubt that many coping experiences are involved in the acculturation and social learning process.

In addition to the domain of cross-cultural coping, this study should inform the current counsellor education system and counsellor educators in terms of how to assist NWC
counsellor trainees with the learning process, and how to make the current training system more effective in serving the needs of NWC trainees. As mentioned earlier, NWC counsellor trainees will undoubtedly have some similar characteristics to their Western colleagues, yet they may also have some very unique psychological and behavioral attributes.

Similarly, not only may NWC trainees’ experience resound many general characteristics of the experience of other NWC people, but this experience may also yield some special features which primarily exist within the group of NWC counsellor trainees. An understanding of such special experiences could be very useful for both the counsellor education system as well as the educators involved in the training process. As a result, a counselling program may take into account, in its design, factors such as cultural sensitivity, knowledge, and skills while these very same facets are also integrated into the training process. As such, counsellor educators may enhance their awareness in working in a culturally diverse teaching-learning environment.

In summary, the theoretical and practical implications of the present study are pertinent to counselling psychology in many respects. The ideas and information engendered from the study may improve the understanding of the career experience of NWC counsellor trainees. This process should enrich and expand counsellor educators’ and other counselling professionals’ existing knowledge toward NWC trainees and clients. The study should also be informative to NWC persons who are struggling through the life career transition to educational training within a Western culture context.
Thus, the study aims at serving as both a catalyst and a bridge: a catalyst in a sense that it should encourage individuals with non-Western cultural backgrounds to become more proactive and agentic in their life career development in Canada; a bridge in a sense that it may provide the NWC people with heuristic insights and concrete coping strategies so that they will become psychologically more prepared and practically more skilful (e.g., openness, flexibility, etc.) in the making of their life career pathway in a new and different sociocultural environment.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Counsellor trainees from non-Western cultures (NWC) go through a tremendous transformational process with respect to their life career development. This process seems to encompass several entangling experiences. NWC counsellor trainees have particular experience of intercultural adjustment along with the more general social and economic challenges of our rapidly changing Western culture within a higher education setting.

Understanding these three interwoven experiences in one’s life career developmental process remains to be the central goal of the present study. In responding to this specific research objective it may be relevant to review the three major categories of literature which are related to the experiences specified above. These three types of literature include theoretical models and perspectives, and research evidence in the areas of (a) career development, (b) the transition to higher education, and (c) cross-cultural adjustment.

Career Development

In discussing the topic of career development, it is necessary to define the meaning of "career" in the scope of the present study. Theorists and researchers have provided a series of definitions focusing on the main characteristics of the term. According to the National Career Development Association (Sears, 1982), career is the totality of work and leisure a person is involved in his or her whole life. Gysbers and Moore (1981) have suggested that the term "career" encompasses various roles, circumstances, and places that one encounters in a lifetime. To reflect the nature of such a comprehensive and complex self-development through the person’s life span, it is advisable that the term "career" be replaced by the phrase "life career development".
McDaniels (1978) argued that while a job or occupation is a part of one's career, it does not represent the whole spectrum of this broad concept. Career means a lifestyle consisting of a sequence of work or leisure activities throughout one's lifetime. Raynor and Entin (1982) pointed out that the term career is a combination of phenomenological and behavioral conceptions. It reflects one's self-perception within one's social context in regard to his or her past and present experiences as well as future plans. Such a nature determines that a career (a) serves as the channel between a person's behaviours and his or her perceptions on these behaviours, and (b) yields time-oriented self-concepts that are interpreted and rationalized by the person's action and its outcome.

When the sense of career is expanded to multi-faceted phenomena of role integration in one's life experiences, factors such as work, education, family, and the like, come into active play in the person's career choice and career building process (Hansen & Keierleber, 1978). According to Super (1976), career can be recognized as

the course of events which constitutes a life; the sequence of occupations and other life roles which combine to express one's commitment to work in his or her total pattern of self-development; the series of remunerated and non-remunerated positions occupied by a person from adolescence through retirement, of which occupation is only one; includes work-related roles such as those of student, employee, and pensioner together with complementary avocational, familial, and civic roles. Careers exist only as people pursue them; they are person-centered. It is this last notion of careers, "they exist only as people pursue them," which summarizes much of the rationale for career guidance. (p. 4)

In reviewing the diverse explanations on the term career, Herr and Cramer (1992) have postulated that careers are (a) unique to each individual, (b) created by the person's choice and decision, (c) dynamic and unfold throughout one's life journey, (d) an integrated entity of prevocational and postvocational considerations, and (e) interrelated with one's other life roles in family, community, and leisure.
Although the definitions provided above seem to differ slightly with respect to their emphasis and wording regarding the concept of career, they appear to echo similar key characteristics and variables. That is, instead of viewing career as a narrowly defined, isolated, and work-related aspect only in one's life, career is seen as an integral, active, and essential component in a person's life.

While one's career experiences always intertwine with other experiences in life, the person's life episodes can well reflect his or her experiences in career development. From this sense, life means career, and vice versa. This seems to coincide with Miller-Tiedeman's (1988) conception of the relationship between life and career, though her definition of "life-is-career" is heavily influenced by phenomenological and existential philosophical stances (Sharf, 1997). "A career is a person's life, and in this usage, there is one career for every person" (Cochran, 1991, p. 7).

Following a similar path of understanding, the present study takes a broad perspective in discerning the meaning of career, and respectively, in defining its conceptual scope. That is, rather than treating career as a single matter on its own, this research intends to look at one's life experiences and career experiences as a whole entity, or in other words, as a blended and co-related human way of being. From this vista, the terms "career" and "life career" are used interchangeably in this study. They are both utilized to define and describe the events, experiences, thoughts, actions, etc. which have impact on one's worklife as well as other aspects of personal and social life. These terms indicate the same process that the person goes through in his or her life passage.
Career As Life Process

The Developmental Nature

Career is about an ongoing process that accompanies the person’s entire life. Perhaps the most influential theory supporting this perspective is Super’s (1990) life-span, life-space approach to career. According to Super (1980), one’s career is composed of a series of main career developmental stages, namely, growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement, throughout his or her whole life. Within each of these stages, the person plays certain career roles and strives to accomplish varied career developmental tasks which are corresponding to these role requirements (Sharf, 1997).

Similar to Super’s conceptions, Ginzberg (1984) and his colleagues contended that career follows a developmental process. As a person enters into different phases of life, his or her views and positions on career choice are defined and refined. Based on tentative evaluation, invalid choices are gradually eliminated, and more appropriate options are being examined and narrowed down. Consequently, a decision on one’s career choice is formed. Although Ginzberg and his colleagues’ (Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951) work focused only on early vocational development for adolescence, and the theory itself has been regarded as incomplete, its developmental view toward individual life career process appears to have not only historical, but up-to-date implications for understanding the evolving and dynamic nature of an individual’s career.

It is particularly worth noticing that in revising some of his early assumptions, Ginzberg (1972) stated that career decision is not an irreversible process, but rather, can be modified as time proceeds and life circumstances change. Ginzberg (1984) claimed:
Occupational choice is a lifelong process of decision making for those who seek major satisfaction from their work. This leads them to reassess repeatedly how they can improve the fit between their changing career goals and the realities of the world of work (p. 180).

Career in this sense has, among other prospects, three core characteristics showing that it (1) attends and goes across one's total lifeline, (2) represents a changing process rather than a static state, and (3) calls for the person to become the active agent who constantly builds constructive bridges between oneself and his or her worklife environment. This is because "life structure once designed is not static; it runs a developmental course and then needs redesign " (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p. 130).

The Diverse Roles

One's life-span consists of a series of roles that he or she needs to play in domains such as family, school, community, and workplace (Super, 1990). Within the entire span of life, the person performs his or her roles such as child, student, leisurite, citizen, worker, spouse, homemaker, parent, and pensioner (Super, 1990). Super (1980) postulated that these life roles interact in a manner which is supportive, supplementary, compensatory, or neutral. Depending on different circumstances, role interactions can be either facilitating or conflicting to one another. This is why "multiple roles can enrich life or overburden it " (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p. 129).

Super, Savickas, and Super (1996) criticized many career theories with respect to the importance of diverse social positions and associated roles enacted by the person in his or her life space. The ultimate and simple truth in explaining a career is that the person lives a life while making a living. As Super, Savickas, and Super (1996) argue:

The work role, albeit a critical role in contemporary society, is only one among many
roles that an individual occupies. A person’s multiple roles interact to reciprocally shape each other. Thus, individuals make decisions about work-role behaviour, such as occupational choice and organizational commitment, within the circumstances imposed by the constellation of social positions that give meaning and focus to their lives. The same job holds different meanings for two individuals who live in different situations (p. 128).

The constant overlapping of role enactment reflects a complex lifelong symphony. In this regard, career is a combination of rich activities and tasks carried out by the individual who is required to take on, and is capable of enforcing, a series of multiple missions in life (Cochran, 1990). These missions render meanings to the diverse roles, and vice versa.

*The Transitional Process*

The fulfilment of roles manifests changes of life in different stages. For example, according to Super’s (1990) chronological sequence model of traditional life career developmental stages (i.e., the life-career rainbow), when the person makes the transition from growth and exploration stages to establishment and maintenance stages, his or her roles of child and student are transformed into that of worker and homemaker, with the roles of leisurite and citizen crossing over all the stages. Role-shift here brings substantial changes in the life-span.

Career transitions, thus, may happen as the person needs to move on to the next phase of his or her life. Parallel to Super’s stage theory, other theorists have tried to pinpoint different reasons that may prompt the person to seek career changes in life. To meet personal needs can certainly be a trigger for a career choice as well as a career move (Roe, 1956, Roe & Lunneborg, 1990). The mutual satisfaction between the person and his or her working environment may be another potential cause for career transition (Dawis, 1996; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). The transition may also be initiated by the individual as
a conscious decision to change his or her courses of career action to fulfil self development (Miller-Tiedeman & Tiedeman, 1990; Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963). It has been noted that career transition is more likely to occur when individuals enter into their adult life of mid-career (i.e., middle phase of the worklife), for it is assumed that people should usually have established their career by then, and are more capable of making changes (Zunker, 1994).

Career transition in the current world of work goes beyond the common sense of time and rationale which are embedded in, and explained by, the traditional life-stage theories. As Herr, Amundson and Borgen (1990) point out, shifting economic boundaries in Western society yields drastic changes in the structure of, choice of, and planning for one's worklife. The worklife today is featured by the fast disappearance of many traditional worker-roles, and the emergence of various new career opportunities based on social, economic, and technological changes (Rifkin, 1995). The end result is that career change has become a regular part of working life during all stages.

It becomes understandable that the swift changing face of our postmodern era has induced a "rapid acceleration in the number of transitions encountered in all aspects of living" (Hopson, 1981, p. 36). Meanwhile, many aspects of adult life experiences themselves frequently involve transitions which may be anticipated or unanticipated, and voluntary or involuntary (Schlossberg, 1987; Hopson & Adams, 1977). From this view, the spectrum and meaning of transition are broadened to include not only influential incidents in certain stages of life (e.g., mid-career change), but also other relevant experiences accompanying the whole developmental process of one's life and career. As Schlossberg (1987) has contended, the transition itself standing alone does not convey much significance
to the person; its importance and meaningfulness lie with its impact on other variables, such as roles and relationships, which can be critical to the person’s growth in his or her life-span.

In an attempt to present a comprehensive model that takes into account a diversity of adult life experiences in transition, Schlossberg (1984) concludes that there are three major components of transition. First, the type, context, and impact of the transition need to be understood. The types of transitions can be defined as anticipated, unanticipated, chronic hassle, and non-event. The context of the transition refers to the relationship between the person and the environment and the circumstance in which the transition happens. The impact of the transition on the person involves the degree of disruption in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. The second component looks at transition as a process rather than an event. It is a process during which people make their appraisals of, and react to, the situation over time. This process is marked by the continuous appraisals and re-assessment by the individuals who are involved. The third and final component refers to an individual’s coping resources as well as the balance of present and potential assets and liabilities. According to Schlossberg (1984) and Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995), factors such as one’s racial and ethnic background, affected by his or her value orientation and cultural norms, could have potential influence in the coping resources.

While Schlossberg’s (1984) model presents an integrated paradigm concerning adult life transition, other theorists look at the issue with a different emphasis. Hopson and Adams (1977), for example, postulate that the individuals’ coping with transition goes through a seven-phase process, namely, immobilization (i.e, the person is overwhelmed, and unable
to respond to the event), minimization (i.e., to make the change appear smaller than it is), self-doubt, letting go (i.e., to let go of anxiety and stress associated emotions), testing out (i.e., develop new energy and a sense of confidence), search for meaning, and internalization (i.e., value and lifestyle change within self). Likewise, Amundson and Borgen (1982) have illustrated a similar model in describing the emotional and behavioral dynamics unemployed people go through in their transition from the initial job loss to the extended unemployment experience. Research shows that these dynamics moderate or intensify the psychological stressors in the transition process (Amundson & Borgen, 1987; Borgen & Amundson, 1987). It may be quite heuristic to extend such a conceptual framework and its associated research evidence into studying other experiences regarding transition and coping. For example, it is probable that NWC persons’ experiences concerning life career transition in general, and cross-cultural adjustment in particular, may echo many of the psychological stages and emotional shifts that unemployed people go through.

Originally developed as a theoretical frame for helping people cope with the transition during unemployment, Amundson’s (1994) concept of "identity negotiation" appears to hold some promise for understanding the transition process. Amundson (1994) suggests that many personal, interpersonal, familial, organizational, socioeconomical, and environmental variables come into play in the definition and redefinition of an individual’s identity during the transition process. Although it is difficult to control many of these exchanges, some factors, such as seeking support from others, directing self-talk, marketing one’s self, and being persistent, can be helpful. While identity negotiation offers a pertinent
approach in coping with transition during unemployment, its general implications may be applicable to persons in other situations of life career transition.

Career As Individual Agency

If career is recognized as a life process, it is vital to identify and understand the human participation in this process. Life career phenomena do not exist without human involvement. People are their own actors in performing career developmental tasks, and they are the self-agents in shaping their life (Cochran & Laub, 1994; Collin & Young, 1986). In life career pursuits, it is the agent who initiates action, otherwise, optimal changes can hardly take place (Amundson, 1995b).

According to Amundson (1995a), the level of people's self-awareness and sense of agency or self-efficacy, among other things, are the two key variables that moderate their life career decisions. These two components are essential since "persons with high levels of self awareness and personal agency are in a better position to respond proactively to external circumstances and exert more control over long terms effects" (Amundson, 1995a, p. 11).

Self-Awareness

It has long been noted in human psychology that the essence of an individual's life rests on the structure of "the self" (Moustakas, 1956). In other words, the person's psychological selfhood forms the very core, monitoring his or her cognitive, emotive, and behavioral aspects, their internal relationships within the person, and their interactions with the external world. In accordance with such a conceptualization, psychologically-oriented career theorists concentrate their attention on the person's selfhood. It is assumed that the

Super’s (1957, 1963, 1981) pioneering work on self-concept has not only formed the core of his developmental theory of life career, but also significantly contributed to the enrichment and expansion of the function of the psychological self in the study of career for the last few decades. Super viewed career development as the process of developing and implementing one’s self-concept. Self-concept is a combination of factors such as biological characteristics, the social roles one plays, and evaluations of the reactions other people have to the person. Self-concept refers to how the person views self and related situations. The self-concept develops throughout the life span. In contrast to trait-and-factor theory (See Williamson, 1972) which focuses on objective and external measures of self, Super saw the self-concept as a subjective psychological entity that interacts with the society-at-large (Sharf, 1997). Self-concept thus can be defined as a "picture of the self in some role, situation, or position, performing some set of functions, or in some web of relationships" (Super, 1963, p. 18).

Furthermore, Super’s elaboration on the conception of "self-concept system" presents a comprehensive and holistic explanation to the theory itself, as well as to the life career phenomena. To clarify the distinction between a self-concept and a self-concept system, Super, Savickas, and Super (1996) have made the following comments:

The former denotes the qualities of a self-concept in a single role such as worker or parent and the latter denotes the qualities of sets or constellation of role self-concepts. This distinction recognizes that people have not just one self-concept but rather a constellation of self-concepts. The self-concept system is the picture the person has of
self in numerous roles and situations. In other words, people have one self-concept system that is general and inclusive; within this system, they have more specific and limited concepts of self in various roles (self as mother, self as teacher, self as partner, and so on) (p. 141).

The vocational self-concept, therefore, is considered to be an important part in one’s total self-concept system. It is "the constellation of self attributes which the individual considers vocationally relevant; these may or may not have been translated into a vocational preference" (Super, 1963, p. 19).

Parallel to Super’s position, Gottfredson (1996) defines self-concept as one’s view of who he or she is; included in it are elements of the individual’s appearance, abilities, personality, gender, values, and place in society. Among these components, some are more essential than others with regard to one’s sense of self. "People may not be able to articulate their self-concepts, nor may their self-perceptions always be accurate, but they act on them and protect them. The self-concept is the object of cognition (the "me"), but it also reflects the person as actor (the "I")" (Gottfredson, 1996, p. 183-184). The cause-effect relationship between the actor and the object, from this view, is reciprocal rather than only one-way.

Both Super’s and Gottfredson’s premises can be partly supported by Holland’s view concerning the role of self-concept in making career choices. The tenet of Holland’s (1966, 1973) person-type theory is based on the trait-and-factor philosophy of a rational match between people and their work environments. Although social influence on the formation of people’s personality type is not a focus of the theory, and therefore is not being illuminated, Holland points out that a career choice reflects one’s self-perception and self-expression of which type of person he or she is. As Holland (1992) has stated:
People search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles (p. 4).

Obviously, the person-environment interaction here goes beyond the traditional objective and external measures emphasized by the trait-and-factor approach. While matching is no doubt still a critical part of the interaction, individuals' awareness of many attributes of the self, such as those specified above by Holland (1992, p. 4), becomes essential in activating the interaction process. The psychological inner-self performs such a significant role that it cannot be replaced by outside variables.

With respect to the inner-self, Tiedeman and Miller-Tiedeman (Miller-Tiedeman & Tiedeman, 1982, 1990; Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963) have articulated the importance of cognitive self-development and associated career decision making behaviour. Tiedeman and Miller-Tiedeman focus on the individual's uniqueness and complexity. Rather than studying decision-making process itself, individual processes in decision making deserve more attention. This is because the person's inner-self or ego development (Miller-Tiedeman & Tiedeman, 1990) plays a central role in the total self-development in life career. "Moreover, in viewing life as a career, individuals should be guided to become more self-directed" (Zunker, 1994, p. 40). As such, the individual's total self-concept or self-concept system is in a continuous process of modification, refinement, and growth. People encounter and cope with emerging ego-crisis within the self-concept system (Erikson, 1968, 1982) through their life-span. The person is considered to be capable of taking such challenges for he or she "is essentially a scientist applying and observing the results of moving to one's own inner wisdom" (Miller-Tiedeman, 1988, p. 34).
According to Miller-Tiedeman & Tiedeman's (1990) lifecareer theory, career choice and decision-making is primarily a self-organizing process in search of life career direction from within. Since career choices are a "shift and focus to one's internal frame of reference" (Miller-Tiedeman & Tiedeman, 1990, p. 31), one's self-concept will function as the central generator and monitor in directing the person to act, to adjust, to change, and to grow. This key function may be illustrated by the metaphor of the control-tower in a modern airport. Without it, neither the airplanes from various routes can come in, nor the flights to different destinations are able to take off. The result is a halt of the air traffic and the airport is unable to function.

By the same token, the role and function of self-concept in one's life career is too vital to be overlooked. It tends to be indisputable that without looking at the individuals' unique formation and associated elements of the inner-self, it is virtually impossible to make sense of who they are, where they come from, and where they are going in their life career pathway. The socially influenced total self-concept, therefore, operates as a core that coordinates and manages the person's self-agency in designing his or her life career blueprints. Based on this notion, one invests energy into the career building process, and takes appropriate action to execute these plans.

Self-Efficacy

Another important part of human agentic quality is the self-knowledge explored by Bandura (1977, 1982, 1986) in his self-efficacy conception, a central construct in social cognitive theory. Bandura (1986) has defined self-efficacy expectations as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain
designated types of performance" (p. 391). According to Bandura (1977, 1986), self-efficacy expectations affect choice and initiation of behaviour, effort, persistence, and hence level of performance or accomplishment.

While designing life career projects, people need to be clearly aware of their aptitude to carry out the tasks required by the world of work. One of the main conditions for an amiable and effective person-environment correspondence in one's worklife is the fit between the worker's capacity and the demands of the work setting (Dawis, 1996). Although our current world of work has substantially changed since Frank Parsons first introduced his ideology of trait-and-factor matching in vocational guidance (see Crites, 1981; Herr & Cramer, 1992; Zunker, 1994), the very principles of Parsons' insights maintain their vitality in our world today. That is, the relationship between the two basic components, the person and the working environment, still remains to be coordinated even though the perspectives and approaches to connect these two parts may vary (Amundson, 1995a; Amundson & Poehnell, 1996; Holland, 1992; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996; Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996).

Having taken environmental circumstances into consideration, self-efficacy expectations are neither mere ego expressions from the inner-self nor sole objective measurements from the external world. Rather, they are subjective self-judgements that are both cognitive in nature and socially constructed. They are cognitive for they require the person's rational thinking to assess his or her ability; they are socially constituted because they take into account of social contexts in which human ability is appraised (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996).
Drawn from Bandura’s (1986) general social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996) intends to illustrate the complex interplay between self-efficacy and other key variables, namely, outcome expectations, and personal goals, in people’s life career development. While all three variables here are considered essential foundations and key mechanisms for people to exercise human agency, self-efficacy has received the most attention in the career literature. Research evidence concerning the critical role and function of self-efficacy has been well documented (Betz, 1992; Betz & Hackett, 1981; Lent & Brown, 1986; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996).

From a social cognitive career perspective, "self-efficacy is not a unitary, fixed, or decontextualized trait but rather involves a dynamic set of self-beliefs that are specific to particular performance domains and that interact complexly with other person, behaviour, and environmental factors " (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996, p. 380). Outcome expectations are defined as people’s beliefs about the consequences or outcomes of performing specific and given behaviours. While both self-efficacy and outcome expectations are acquired and modified through learning experiences, the former affect the latter more substantially given that the quality of one’s enaction could have strong impact on the outcomes. Goals are the person’s stamina to take particular actions for producing a purposeful outcome. Because people organize, guide, and maintain their behaviour under the direction of certain goals, goals form the very mechanism inspiring people to strive for personal agency in their life career pursuit (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996).

Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1996) postulate that the interaction between goals, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations in the self-regulation system involve complex and
interweaving interaction with one another. "For instance, goals are assumed to influence the development of self-efficacy, while self-efficacy and outcome expectations, in turn, affect the goals that one selects and the effort expended in their pursuit" (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996, p. 382). Thus, it becomes quite clear that self-efficacy can hardly be regarded as an isolated factor; it only displays its vigour when it co-exists with other components, especially the other two central variables, i.e., goals and outcome expectations, in people’s social cognitive career system.

An understanding of the interplay of these three basic components in the formation and functioning of human agency, as Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1996) point out, helps to clarify and interpret crucial relationships between (a) people and their career-related contexts, (b) cognitive and interpersonal factors, and (c) self-directed and externally imposed impact on career behaviour (p. 374). These relational aspects seem to cover the broad spectrum of interactive dynamics in people’s life career span. Having a good look at these aspects may inform people about the complex nature of career construction, and enhance people’s coping skills in this process.

**Career As Meaning Making**

Collin and Young (1986) found that the existing career literature appears to have paid little attention to, among other things, contextual factors as well as people’s subjective perspective of career. They suggested three models, namely, ecological, biographical, and hermeneutical approaches, for theory development. The ecological approach attempts to address interrelationships rather than cause and effect in life career path. The biographical approach treats people as acting agents in an open narrative of their life experiences. The
hermeneutical approach refers to meaning interpretation which helps people to comprehend interrelational aspects in their life career ecology, and make sense of experiences in their biographical narratives (Collin & Young, 1986).

Expanding on these foundational same conceptions (Collin & Young, 1988, 1992; Young, 1988; Young & Collin, 1988), Young, Valach, and Collin (1996) formed a contextual explanation of career. While the two basic components, i.e., the person and the environment, are still the key variables in the system, the contextual approach takes a very different interpretation of the person-context interaction from those of traditional career theories. It is different in that its definition of context is comprised of three salient aspects: multiplicity, meaning, and interweaving. While the feature of multiplicity refers to structure, the interweaving facet characterizes functions (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996).

The underlying philosophy of this approach is that rather than breaking phenomena into segments, the wholeness of an event and the interpenetration of its features are well recognized. The conception here is parallel to "the metaphor of weaving a tapestry and creating a pattern by the interweaving of its threads " (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996, p. 479). Guided by this principle, the contextual approach maintains that (a) the context is composed of complexity and multiplicity of possible connections and interrelationships, (b) people's perspective is critical as it influences what will be perceived and how it will be interpreted, and (c) interpretation remains open-ended as actors in a situation continuously make new meanings.

As has been illustrated and implied in the analysis, a life career episode means a very complex and dynamic person-in-context process. There seems to be no linear and fixed
equation that can fully explain such a human experience. The bottom line here is that human
behaviour can only be described and understood with its inner and associative meanings,
nothing but the meanings, within the particular context. Life career experience is no
exception. This calls for an integrated, reflexive, and most of all, open approach to construe
human enactment in life career. The key constructs in the contextual model (Young, Valach,
& Collin, 1996) have addressed some of these main concerns. The three key facets, namely,
context, interpretation, and narrative (Collin & Young, 1986, 1992; Young, Valach, &
Collin, 1996), co-exist with one another, and collectively constitute people's subjective
career. Gaining a perspective of how these core constructs interrelate to one another seems
to be particularly heuristic in helping people search for, and make sense of meanings
entangled in their career path.

Context

To perceive the complexity and multiplicity of the context, it is necessary to focus
on time, space, and interrelationships. Time denotes the changing nature of human life while
space identifies with the setting where events and stories take place. Interrelationships
designate the interweaving characteristics of direct and indirect factors and their complicated
interactions within the particular time and space. An example of this interactive system of
context may be derived from Super's (1990) developmental theory. The continuation of
people's life journey requires constant role change. As life enters into next phase, there will
be a different setting, or "theatre" in Super's term, for actors to perform their career
missions. Along with this new phase of life, there may be change of old interrelationships,
and obviously, new interrelationships may come into play in the process.
While Super's (1990) stage proposition here makes common sense and is still relevant, the postmodern constructivist-oriented explanations (see Amundson, 1994, 1995a; Cochran, 1990; Collin & Young, 1992; Peavy, 1993; Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996) take more holistic, dynamic, and open views in defining the nature and scope of career context, in which the time and space dimensions go above and beyond the spectrum set by the traditional stage models such as Super's (1980) and Gottfredson's (1981). The essential quality of context, hence, is to reflect a flexible, broad, and interactive ecological frame that is not only inclusive of various human and social relationships, but galvanizing to the interaction among these relationships.

In illustrating the determining contexts for one's career decision making, Amundson (1995a) contends that elements like culture, economic and political events, the interpersonal roles, and the self-structure (e.g., self-awareness/concept, self-agency, etc.), are all being intertwined in the making of one's career context. Collin and Young (1992) indicate that such context has been marked by rapid and dynamic transformations of "massive environmental, political, economic, social and technological change" (p. 3). Not only are various relationships interweaving in forming the context, but their changing potency may affect one another, and modify the quality of the existing context. As a result, the making of a new context can be constantly in process, and new and different contexts may emerge.

Needless to say, context can either facilitate or hinder people's exercises of their personal agency and expressions of their inner-self. Social structure and its evolution can certainly yield important conditions in forming a favourable or disagreeable life career context for people (Hotchkiss & Borow, 1996). Analyzing life career development from a
sociological perspective, Hotchkiss and Borow (1996) suggest that factors such as parental work/occupational status, structure of the evolving labour market, and race and gender, could all become vital contextual effects that may nourish or block a person's career growth.

The swift changes in the current world of work may also render pros and cons with regard to one's life and career. As Peavy (1993) has pointed out, these phenomenal changes in our postindustrial (PI) society have been fermenting the context that tremendously facilitates the life career enhancement of the first class of people and obstructs that of the second class of people. The first class of people are those who are educated and trained to function well in an information intensive environment, and they possess the capacity and desire to lead lives characterized by high degrees of symbolic interaction. The second class of people includes youth, the unemployed, displaced blue-collar workers and families, minorities, and the aged. This class of people are increasingly marginalized because they may lack the symbolic interaction skills required by the PI workplace. As such, societal changes can be influential in context formation and transformation.

Moreover, contextual circumstances may be moderated by other factors, especially self-structure related variables. For instance, a person who possesses transferable skills and knows how to utilize them may be in a more advantageous position to cope with contextual changes (Amundson & Poehnell, 1996). In a similar fashion, people who have acquired the integral life career attributes of "moxie", i.e., an amalgamation of courage, assertiveness, energy, skills, competence and shrewdness (Amundson, 1996b), may have better chances of exercising their personal agency in a rapidly changing work environment. Also, personal flexibility seems to be another pivotal attitude people need to employ when they encounter
the challenging work context of the 21st century (Gelatt, 1989; Herr, 1993a, 1993b).

**Interpretation**

The person-environment interaction consists of both objective and subjective career. The former refers to the observed progress of the person through organization or occupation, while the latter means individual perspective (Collin & Young, 1986). Objective career has historically been the centre of attention of career theories and research (for examples, see Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1992; Super, 1990; Williamson, 1972). The exploration on subjective career has been a relatively recent phenomenon in the field (for examples, see Amundson, 1994, 1995a; Collin & Young, 1986, 1992; Polkinghorne, 1990; Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996). As Polkinghorne (1990) states, the career field embraces these two seemingly conflicting views. That is, objective career accepts the tenets of natural science, sees human behaviour as analogous to the movement of natural objects, and being governed by the regularity of law. On the other hand, subjective career focuses on the ordinary assumptions of human freedom and responsibility.

Subjective career, or how actors perceive and feel about their life career enactment, is too pivotal to be neglected and rests on the essence of meaning making. One’s career path is constructed by different life roles and events that are always comprised of certain meanings to the person. Because individuals’ enactment is goal-oriented and purposeful, no career action exists without meanings attached to it. While the subjective career experience may substantially affect the objective career, there may be discrepancies between the two sides, and they may not parallel to each other (Collin & Young, 1986). This suggests that (a) there is an interrelationship between the subjective and objective career, and (b) with the
consideration of context, an observed objective role or event may be interpreted in diverse meanings through one's subjective perspective.

Meaning interpretation, in this usage, becomes indispensable in one's subjective career. The central point is perspective-taking: different perspectives on the same event may generate different meanings. The perspective one takes can significantly influence the interpretation of an event or situation (Amundson, 1996a). Meanings in the life career process are dynamic and open for subjective interpretation since they can be negotiated (Amundson, 1994). The nature of negotiation connotes a sense of tentativeness for rethinking, revision, and re-explication. This may well lead to the opportunity of coming up with new ideas and career behaviour. Amundson (1995a) refers to such a mechanism as the process of framing and reframing meanings in one's career planning and decision making.

Young, Valach, and Collin (1996) define interpretation as the process by which people make sense of action and context. The constructs of human intentionality and goal orientation in action and context are particularly salient for interpretation. Manifest behaviour, social meaning, functional steps, elements, and action are all connected in the interpretation process (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996). Meaning loses its essence and relevance if action is not described and perceived in the context in which it takes place. Meanwhile, as both action and context may change their courses or be modified, meaning making from contextual life career enactment remains flexible and open-ended.

It has been noted that interpreting life career experiences becomes possible only when each experience is recounted and discerned in its broad as well as specific context (Young & Collin, 1992). For example, in describing women's career development, the
context of young women in a caring profession (Faltermaier, 1992) may differ from that of entrepreneurial women (Young & Richards, 1992). While sharing some broad psychological common denominators, the actions of these two groups of women vary in terms of coping with their particular career contexts. As a result, the meanings they draw from their career experiences may also differ. This is where the richness and validity of subjective career exist; this is what makes interpretation critical in studying people's life career path; and most of all, this is why it is so meaningful to make sense of one's life career experience through the meaning making process.

**Narrative**

Interpretation becomes possible when there are existence and occurrence of events and situations in varied contexts. To a large extent, people live narrative lives. Subjective career is about interpreting what has happened, and is going to happen, in one's life career enactment, and narrative is considered an important feature of interpretation (Young & Collin, 1992). Not only can meanings be interpreted from what already exists, i.e., the past stories, but meanings can also be yielded from these events and situations for anticipating the future plan. In either way, "the interpreter translates according to her or his present and anticipated context" (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996, p. 490). While context is being influenced by, and presents, a blend of psychosocial variables, narrative "is built from history, culture, society, relationships, and language. It embodies context" (Collin & Young, 1992, p. 8).

Taylor (1989) argues that human beings find the sense of life through articulating it. Such articulation, then, is cultivated by stories happening in our everyday life for narrative
is a natural form of meaning making. In examining the core dimensions of human action, Polkinghorne (1990) proposes that the narrative scheme performs a central function in life career evolution. He states:

The narrative scheme is the intellectual process that relates human activities to one another and makes them meaningful. It reveals purpose and direction in human affairs and makes individual human lives comprehensible as wholes. We conceive our own and others’ behaviour within the narrative framework and through it we recognize the effects that planned actions can have on desired goals...The ordering of relationships by the narrative scheme results from its power to bind a sequence of events into a unified happening; it makes individual events comprehensible by identifying the whole to which they contribute (p. 94).

It appears that one of the essential qualities of human narrative is its coherence in constructing the sequence of events in the meaning making process. Cochran (1990) defines this phenomenon as "holistic construction" that reflects a coherent whole for further refinements, extensions, and revisions.

According to Young, Valach, and Collin (1996), goals and intentions that are formed through social discourse tend to contribute to the establishment of coherence. "A coherent narrative is one in which there is a sequence or temporal ordering of events that make sense to the person " (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996, p. 491). Meanwhile, rather than preceding other dimensions of the narrative, coherence is constructed simultaneously with them. Coherence allows the narrator/actor to search for meaningful explanations in understanding what has happened in his or her life career path (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996).

The nature of coherence, or holistic construction (Cochran, 1990), in the development of life career narrative, may be demonstrated more explicitly by the cycle of repetition and rhythm in human life. According to Cochran (1990), such a cycle is composed of four phases, namely, incompletion, positioning, positing, and completion.
Incompletion concerns the arousal and unification of an enduring structure of desire. While segments of events or stories seem to be scattered over one’s lifeline, the narrator has the desire to unify them into a definite intention, and to transform them into a larger and full story. Positioning refers to an adjustment of circumstances. It shapes a composition of being in the longer and larger story, during which the narrator collects and refines relevant contents drawn from his or her personhood. Positing represents the enactment of position. Having positioned him or herself, one takes action to actualize the spirit of one’s being. The actor performs life career episodes within dramatic contexts, and the series of sub-plots shape the main storyline of the full narrative. Completion signifies the end of one’s positioning and a period of life; it can come at any stage of one’s life and career. Completion concludes somehow what was aroused in the beginning, when there was a sense of incompleteness. Even though both positive or negative senses may be entangled in ending the larger and full story, the narrative serves to elevate a transient sense to an enduring quality of being for a life career period (Cochran, 1990).

These four phases constitute a consistent flow of the beginning, the middle, and the end of a full story that expresses meanings intertwined within. As seemingly scattered events are integrated into this flow, they merge to unfold unified themes underlying the structure of the narrative. This enables the actor/narrator to be aware, and make sense, of meanings drawn from career enactment. "The narrative is not a reproduction of events but a construction that the teller thinks the other should know for some reason" (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996, p. 490). The narrator can not obtain this goal unless he or she is actively involved in organizing and interpreting the narrative. In this respect, the holistic
construction of narratives opens a reflexive channel of meaning making in life career enactment.

In identifying narrative's relationship to career and action, Young and Valach (1996) make several important points. First, not only does narrative serve to construct and facilitate intentional, goal-oriented action, but it can also unify separate, unrelated actions into a coherent and continuing flow of meanings. Second, narrative renders a guide for action. While career is constructed within the present narrative frame, enactment and meaning making provide implications for future career direction and endeavour. Third, people do not live completely in narratives. That is why action has to be stressed in everyday life; action consists of both practical measures in dealing with objects, and symbolic demeanour to encounter signs and symbols over one's life career span.

**Transition to Higher Education**

Going to study at colleges and universities may mean a significant life career transition to many people. Not only do young adults (i.e., recent graduates from high school) experience such a life transformation, but mature students returning to higher education from the world of work also go through the same experience (Arthur & Hiebert, 1996; Chen, 1999a; Cleave-Hogg, 1996; Halamandaris & Power, 1997; Staton, 1993).

Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) postulate that adult students' coping with transition to university life is similar to that in other life career situations. This transition encompasses three general stages: moving into a new situation, moving in the situation, and moving out of the situation. These stages form a transitional pathway for people to go through in their student lives in higher education context (Schlossberg, Lynch, &
Chickering, 1989). It is a complex process in which many educational, vocational, personal and social dynamics are interactively engaged (Russell & Petrie, 1992).

Halamanaris and Power (1997) point out that the transition to university life represents a psychological adjustment. Hoffmann (1989, p. 8) suggests that issues entangled in this adjustment are primarily "relational" in nature. According to Panori and Wong (1995) and others (Cosden & McNamara, 1997; Oswalt & Finkelberg, 1995; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996; Zia & Jarama, 1995), the main facets featuring students' adjustment to university life include issues such as self-role change, social connectedness, and academic competence in the new learning context. These aspects to some extent seem to reflect the basic characteristics of the transition. Thus, this brief discussion will look at these three basic constructs that constitute the process.

Identity Negotiation

In describing and interpreting the experiences of students with disabilities in a large Canadian university, Low (1996) argues that the adjustment to life on campus is a process of negotiation. These students negotiate disabled and non-disabled identities while negotiating the physical environment of the university campus. Although Low's (1996) study focused solely on university students with disabilities, its central postulation of negotiating identities and environments appears to be equally relevant to the psychological adjustment of students without disabilities. This is to say that all students, to some extent, must negotiate their new identity within the new environment.

People assume different roles during various developmental stages (Super, 1990). Identities here are synonymous to the life career roles people need to take on (Amundson,
For many people, the role of a university student is a new identity they encounter. To undertake the new identity means that individuals have to transform themselves to the university student role both psychologically and practically (Goossens, 1995). Staton (1993) states that for recent graduates from high schools, becoming a university student means embarking on the new identity of an independent young adult. According to Gianakos (1996), with a more clearly defined goal of personal fulfilment, student role may be one of the critical identities in a life career project for mature students returning to higher education from the world of work.

Such role change or identity transformation may not be an easy task. It calls for an effective coping process so that individuals may be able to gradually adjust to their new identity. One of the main psychological challenges people face is to cope with the feeling of loss when they leave their perceived identity when moving out of a situation, and accept a new identity as they move into a situation (Fassinger & Schlossberg, 1992; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Vickio, 1990).

Students get used to the life roles they have already adapted, and they often go into a new life situation with unfinished past feelings. They feel anxious when they need to move forward to assume the new identity in a new environment (Briggs, 1995; Paul & Kelleher, 1995). As Vickio (1990) indicates, very often university students find it difficult to say good-bye to their past life roles. According to Tinto (1986), a major reason behind this sense of loss is that students treasure the social relationships they have had before, but they have not yet been able to connect themselves to the new community, e.g., making friends, acquaintances, and getting to know people on the university or college campus.
Embracing the new role of a university student thus requires an adjustment process. People need to make themselves adaptable to the new environment before they can function effectively with their student identity. A students' self-concept appears to have a huge impact on their role transition (Cosden & McNamara, 1997; House, 1992; Panori & Wong, 1995; West, 1996). Entering and continuing in higher education represents a significant part of the students' lives. Not only do learners use this opportunity to pursue vocational ambitions, but they also participate in a proactive construction for authentic selves in the new environment, i.e., the context of higher education (West, 1996).

In studying university students' lives through biographical and narrative research, West (1996) has found that the transition to the role of a university student denotes the process of replacing the person's older identity with the new one. According to West (1996), such an adjustment involves formal and informal learning experiences (e.g., learning from the classroom, fellow students, and other aspects of the university system). Students expose and adapt themselves to significant changes, and they compose new lives along the way. West (1996) further argues that higher education can offer learners some space to experiment with their identities. An understanding of this experience, for both the students and the higher education system, is pivotal to a sound mission of teaching and learning.

Social Connectedness

An important aspect that mediates the level of role adjustment seems to be people's sense of connectedness and belonging to the higher education environment. Research indicates that perceived social support is considered as one of the key factors during the transition to university life (Cosden & McNamara, 1997; Halamandaris & Power, 1997).
In a recent study regarding self-concept and perceived social support among college students with and without learning disabilities, Cosden and McNamara (1997) found that social support from campus organizations and instructors are associated with students' formation of their self-concept in the new learning environment.

The more satisfaction students feel about their social support, the more confident and positive they feel about their identity adjustment, and the more active they become in coping (Zea & Jarama, 1995). There is evidence that students who have gained social support appear to cope more effectively in their role transition process (Lamothe & Currie, 1995). One of the major concerns students have when entering university is about losing existing social relationships in their life. Building new social relationships is found to be significant in students' perception of their self-worth and self-acceptance. Social relationships such as friends and peers become resources for students' social self-esteem (Paul & Kelleher, 1995). According to Parish and Necessary (1995), relationships with peers can have a strong impact on students' self-concepts.

Close friendships and social acceptance on campus seem to greatly facilitate students' sense of identity in the new learning context (Panori & Wong, 1995). If their social relations are deficient, psychological difficulties such as loneliness and isolation are likely to occur. Not only could such difficulties cause maladjustment to students' academic and social lives, but they could also jeopardize a person's psychological sense of well-being (Blai, 1989; Johnson, Rose, & Russell, 1992). A study done by Oswalt and Finkelberg (1995) shows that 90 percent of the students considered themselves as being depressed since arriving at college even though the degree of depression was usually moderate and the duration was short (i.e.,
less than 1 month in most cases). The three identified sources of depression were issues related to personal relationships, general social adjustment on campus, and grades (Oswalt & Finkelberg, 1995).

The core of social relationships is about students’ sense of connectedness and community on campus (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1995). People have the need to support and to be supported in a competitive and new learning environment; they also have the need to matter and to express themselves in an open and facilitating campus climate (Schlossberg et al., 1989). These needs can only be satisfied under the circumstance that safe and comfortable social relationships are in place (Cosden & McNamara, 1997; Halamandaris & Power, 1997).

The challenge of building new social connectedness on campus remains twofold. On one hand, the university community needs to reach out to students, and help them understand that they do have an extensive peer group within the university or college setting, and there are social networks and organizations on campus that will provide support (Heinzen & Rakes, 1995; Lamothe & Currie, 1995; Molidor & Wright, 1996). On the other hand, students themselves may need to be more proactive in social networking in the new context. Research evidence suggests that students who adopt more positive and constructive attitudes toward identity change may benefit in their transition to university life in general, and in validating social support and relationships within the campus community in particular (Halamandaris & Power, 1997). Presumably, they may be more successful in obtaining and utilizing social support resources from the university community for their academic enhancement and personal well-being.
While looking at individuals' life career pathway, Amundson (1995a) states that various relational aspects of life such as family, friends, and other social relationships should not be ignored in the coping process. This tends to also reflect students' transitional life experiences in the university community. In studying Canadian university students' transitional coping on campus, Arthur and Hiebert (1996) found that family and relationship demands are weighed by students as more important and influential than academic demands. Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992a) claim that family environments can critically impact students' well-being in their university life. Family and significant social relationships are recognized as resources for coping with psychological difficulties during the adjustment (Oswalt & Finkelberg, 1995).

In this sense, interpersonal relationships off campus, especially family relationships, may be considered as critical parts of a students' coping resources and mechanisms in developing connectedness to the campus community, and making adjustment to the university life. Factors such as family value and attitude toward higher education, family support, family influence in a student's decision-making, financial situation of the family, family expectations upon the individual, etc., can all have either positive or negative influences in students' life transition. As Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) indicate, family support is so vital that it can provide the psychological strength to make adult students in transition feel more positive and confident in taking on new challenges.

Fostering a sense of community and taking actions to develop social connectedness, therefore, becomes an essential task for students as they adjust to a higher education context.
Academic Competence

Another key aspect regarding university students' adjustment in the situation, or in the coping process, is how they deal with their academic progress and achievement (Cleave-Hogg, 1996; Cosden & McNamara, 1997; Lamothe & Currie, 1995; Oswalt & Finkelberg, 1995; Panori & Wong, 1995; Zeidner, 1995). Shilkret and Nigrosh (1997) indicate that college students have plans for college that consist of conscious and unconscious goals and obstructions to be overcome in meeting those goals. A pivotal part of these plans may include scholastic activities given the nature of students' learning career in the higher education context.

Research suggests that the importance placed on academic competence is generally agreed upon among the general student population with different levels of intellectual abilities and learning skills (Cosden & McNamara, 1997). There has been evidence that students' withdrawal or persistence behaviour depends on how they can adjust to the new academic and social demands of the university environment (Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996). As such, if students find themselves to be competent in meeting academic demands, they may be more interested in engaging themselves in the learning effort.

People's self-concept system (see Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) in general, and their academic self-perceptions in particular interact vigorously with their actual performance in the learning process (Cosden & McNamara, 1997). Students feel more satisfied with life on campus when they have a sense of scholastic competence in their learning, and this reinforces a positive academic self-concept (Panori & Wong, 1995). Hackett and Betz (1992) postulate that students' self-perceptions of capabilities, or self-
efficacy beliefs, are strongly influenced by their learning experiences in college.

Similarly, the quality of learning is also affected by other internal variables. One such intra-personal factor closely related with people's agentic endeavour and action is motivation. Research indicates that students' level of academic cognition is correlated with their personal motivation in learning (Nenniger, 1992; Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992). Students' personal interest in the course subjects, or content-oriented motivation, can either facilitate or hamper their cognitive capacities in scholastic work (Nenniger, 1992). Pintrich and Schrauben (1992) suggest that academic achievement motivation can substantiate students' cognitive engagement in academic tasks. The motivational factor not only impacts academic cognition, but it may influence their overall academic adjustment and success in the higher education context (Russell & Petrie, 1992). Motivation may provide students with psychological strengths to overcome difficulties in academic tasks, and consequently, it may enhance their sense of personal agency in goal achievement.

The learning environment can also have tremendous impact on the person with respect to his or her coping process. A common denominator for anxiety and stress arousal is academic evaluation (Oswalt & Finkelberg, 1995; Zeidner, 1995). Academic requirements such as examinations and grades may make students feel under constant pressure of being measured and judged. While such evaluation experience could make people feel more motivated, it may also become a source of distress in students' academic pursuits.

It may be worth noting that academic competence is not merely an issue of learning skill, but rather, it is considered by many people to be an important prospect of meaning making in their life career development in the higher education context (Cleave-Hogg,
In exploring the learning experience of adult students returning from the world of work, Cleave-Hogg (1996) indicates that for these students, academic demands represent a continuity of life career challenges they encounter; they make meaning of this educational experience, and they learn actively from the learning process itself.

Similarly, Broadbridge (1996) found that university students are in favour of a developmental approach to academic advising. That is, academic advising should involve students in learning and exploring life career goals via academic planning. From this perspective, the enhancement of academic capability is aimed at long term personal goals, and it becomes a vital portion of students' life career project. As such, the definition of academic achievement transcends its face meaning; it denotes the endeavour for one's life career construction.

Cross-cultural Adjustment

There is little doubt that to live in a new cultural environment is usually a very challenging experience for an individual. The person encounters various demands with regard to social, economic, cultural, and psychological adjustments in this unfamiliar surrounding. The impact of such adjustments on the person can be critical as it may either hinder or facilitate one's life career development in the host culture.

Existing literature concerning the topic of cross-cultural adjustment tends to focus more on the factors that could affect the person's capacity for a healthy growth in the mainstream culture. Theoretical models and research studies seem to agree with the general assumption that these elements generally function as negative barriers to individuals who come from a culture other than that of the Western mainstream society. Although such
adjustment impediments are examined from different angles and with different purposes, they basically present similar phenomena that can be categorized into several major types.

It is assumed that whether a person comes to North America for re-settlement (such as an immigrant) or the person is here to pursue an academic life (such as an international student), he or she needs to cope with similar general adjustments such as culture shock (Furnham & Bockner, 1986), language barriers, and the like, when going through the cross-cultural transition. The target population in the current study, namely, counsellor trainees from non-Western cultures (NWC counsellor trainees/persons), includes both recent immigrants as well as international students. Therefore, the terms "international students" and "NWC students/persons (students/persons from non-Western cultures)" are used interchangeably in this section.

While literature concerning general immigrants is considered relevant and heuristic to explore and discern the general characteristics of cross-cultural adjustment, this section of the discussion will mainly focus on the issues particularly associated with NWC persons who have been pursuing their career in higher education settings (NWC students) in North America. With such a goal in mind, I intend to briefly summarize some of the major factors that are considered critical to NWC counsellor trainees' life career transition and development in the context of North American host culture.

Second Language Difficulty

Language barriers may be one of the main psychological and tangible roadblocks (Pedersen, 1991b; Wehrly, 1988). The problem is psychological in the sense that it can have a strong and long-lasting impact on the person's self-concept and other related cognitive,
emotive, and behavioral aspects in adjusting to the unfamiliar host culture. It is tangible in the sense that language proficiency is a basic and necessary means to adequate communication which is essential to simple daily living as well as more complex technical and academic activities such as working in professional settings and studying in higher education institutions. Research indicates that NWC people are usually vulnerable in facing language difficulty. Such difficulty yields stress, anxiety, and other associated psychological obstacles (Aubrey, 1991; Oropeza & Fitzgibbon, 1991; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Ying & Liese, 1991).

In studying the major concerns of international students in the United States, Aubrey (1991), Pedersen (1991b), and others (e.g., Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; White & Brown, 1983; Williamson, 1982; Ying & Liese 1991) found that language difficulty was listed among one of the top priorities. Similarly, the language hurdle remains as one of the central concerns for other immigrant groups. For example, Ying (1996) found in a recent study that a major challenge for immigrants is their mastery of English language. Lee and Westwood (1996) contend that language capability is certainly one of the core requirements for immigrant professional workers to re-establish themselves in the new Western economy. If immigrants do not have adequate language skills, they may find themselves disadvantaged in worklife as well as in social life (Naidoo, 1992).

It is not difficult to imagine how one feels when he or she is having a hard time to understand, and being understood by, others in an unfamiliar host culture. Adversity in verbal and written communications makes the NWC person feel uncomfortable in daily life. Further, it leads to feelings of insecurity. Language difficulty not only contributes to
inconvenience and awkward situations in daily routines, it also inhibits or even cripples one’s capacity for social interaction. Ishiyama (1989) argues that incompetence in language communication may make one feel inferior, confused, and less willing to communicate with others. The less people interact with others, the poorer their social and language skills become and the more disconfirmed they feel, leading to a negative self fulfilling circle. It is not surprising that for those who use English as a secondary language in pursuing their academic career at colleges and universities, language competency is a critical factor which heavily affects self-concept and self-efficacy in work and study performance.

NWC counsellor trainees may be even more aware of the challenge posed by the second language competency. As a subject area in the social science domain, counselling psychology is a "language-intensive" profession, so is its training process for trainees. Unlike studies in natural and applied sciences that can be pursued through many universally accepted and understood technical symbols and signs (e.g., numbers, formulas, equations), studies in social sciences are basically language-oriented and deep rooted in different sociocultural contexts. This means that the mastery of the language is the prerequisite for one to enter the social science realm in a specific sociocultural context. Counselling psychology is obviously one of the social science areas which is very dependent on language proficiency. The quality of verbal communication in a counselling encounter can significantly facilitate or hinder the therapeutic process. Therefore, the verbal communication training is a very demanding task for trainees from Western cultures. With this in mind, NWC counsellor trainees are faced with the challenge of obtaining clear, consistent, and effective verbal communication skills in their counselling training. Such a
learning process may involve a substantial amount of courage, self-discipline, painstaking effort, psychological adjustment, and concrete coping behaviour. Personal agency may play a central role in coordinating the learning process.

There has been sufficient research evidence suggesting that factors closely associated with NWC students’ life can be primarily categorized into two parts. They include a) factors related with academic and educational environment, and b) factors in sociocultural and personal domain (Aubrey, 1991). Language effect appears to be too important to be ignored as its psychological and practical influences are intertwined virtually with all other issues in both educational and sociocultural domains. It has a strong impact on NWC students’ validation of their personal well-being in the host cultural context (Ishiyama, 1989).

Educational Factors

It is a very common phenomenon that NWC students view their academically related adjustment in North America as the first and foremost priority when they come to this new environment (Dillard & Chisolm, 1983). Most NWC students pay much more attention to academically related anxieties when they seek help although their problems are not primarily academic (Aubrey, 1991). In a study concerning perceptions of self-adaptation in a Canadian university, students from Africa and Southeast Asia identified academic expectation as one of the major issues (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). Anxieties in educational domain are so pivotal to a NWC student’s adjustment in the new environment that they cannot be ignored. Literature and research suggest that (see Aubrey, 1991; Leong & Mallinckrodt, 1990; Leong & Sedlacek, 1986; Liberman, 1994; Marion, 1986; Oropeza & Fitzgibbon, 1991; Svarney, 1989; White & Brown, 1983) these education-related factors may include issues such as
performance expectations and system adjustment.

*Performance Expectations*

Aiming at making academic achievements (e.g., obtaining degrees, gaining credentials, and enhancing research experiences, etc.) in North America, NWC students pay serious attention to their academic performance. They expect that they will perform as good as, if not better than, what they previously accomplished in their home country. How they perceive their academic performance could either facilitate or hinder the adaptation process. If they perceive they are academically successful, they may feel more confident in living in the new environment. Otherwise, they may feel discouraged or disappointed. It has been noted that this kind of academic performance related expectations are actually among the main factors affecting NWC students' adaptation process (Oropeza & Fitzgibbon, 1991).

Compared to their North American fellow students, NWC students are more likely to experience varied degrees of discrepancies between their expected and actual performances, especially during their initial studying period here because of difficulties in adapting to the new educational as well as social cultural environment (White & Brown, 1983). This may lead them to become more vulnerable to performance-expectation-associated negative feelings and distress.

To many of these students, the expectation for academic success is not merely an individual matter; but rather, a combination of self-and-others' psychological well-being (Lee, 1984). The influences of family and friends play an integral part. For instance, a student who did not achieve what he or she had expected may feel that he/she is letting family and friends down. As a result, negative meanings may be generated in terms of self-
concept and self-efficacy.

System Adjustment

NWC students find that they face the demands of a new educational system with which they are not familiar (Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986). Being unfamiliar with the new educational system may cause confusion and frustration among NWC students. Research evidence shows that international students often suffer from a loss of focus in classroom instruction (Liberman, 1994; White & Brown, 1983). Also, a study comparing cross-cultural variations in stress and adjustment between Asian and Caucasian graduate students (see Leong & Mallinckrodt, 1990) found that Asian students have greater difficulties in two areas: (a) trying to memorize, and (b) trying to use their creative imagination.

There is little doubt that the level of NWC students' English language proficiency plays a central role in their adjustment to the new classroom setting, and academic achievement is related to English language ability (Marion, 1986). As indicated in a previous analysis, the ability of adequate understanding and using English in their life in general, and in their academic activities (e.g. classroom communication, homework assignments) in particular, has always been one of the most important concerns in international students' life agenda (White & Brown, 1983). For students who are studying in "language-intensive" social science areas such as counselling psychology, the skilful mastering of the English language becomes a critical issue.

Nonetheless, the language factor is not the only major variable engendering barriers. As a study done by Liberman (1994) indicated, there are value-oriented and structure-oriented elements involved in classroom instruction. Liberman (1994) found that while Asian
students enjoy the democratic teaching and learning atmosphere in an American university, they are critical of the fact that classroom communication tends to be too informal, and professors are not treated with enough respect. This may imply that NWC students not only find value differences but also different methods of pedagogy in their new learning environment.

One such example concerns class presentation. NWC students without any prior knowledge of North American "class participation" find that they have to do class presentations as a part of their mandatory course work. This may impose a challenge to them for class presentation is a totally new skill that they need to learn. The class presentation combines imagination and creativity which may be a capacity that many NWC students are lacking (Leong & Mallinckrodt, 1990). Philosophical and practical differences such as those indicated above, in both on-campus and off-campus academic training activities, could hinder international students' adjustment to the learning system as well as their expectations for success.

By the same token, for NWC counsellor trainees, system adjustment goes beyond gaining language proficiency. One of the challenges might be to deal with experiential learning and self-discovery in counsellor training. The essence of counsellor education is about enhancing trainees' capacity for self-awareness as well as gaining practical helping techniques. Personal exploration may be quite a "foreign" concept to many NWC counsellor trainees. For example, for trainees who come from cultures emphasizing collectiveness, individual welfare is very much a part of the group or community welfare, and therefore, has been rarely thought about in their lives (Amundson, 1995a; Chen, 1995). As a result,
adjusting to the Western-style self-exploration in learning and training could become quite a challenge to many NWC trainees. Not only does this require behavioral change, but also philosophical change as NWC counsellor trainees try to adapt themselves to the new learning environment.

Sociocultural Factors

Variables associated with sociocultural concerns have a broad and substantial impact on NWC students’ life and career development. The foregoing education-related factors can be recognized as a part of the sociocultural factors. It has already been noted that educational issues do not happen in a vacuum. Education-related components connote a strong relationship between a special population (i.e. NWC students) and a particular sociocultural environment (i.e. academic institutions in North American). Educational factors reflect a very important part of the person-environment relationship. Moreover, sociocultural factors intertwine with educational factors, and explain educational factors within a broader context.

Culture Shock

Culture shock has been described as one of the main concerns with respect to NWC students’ mental health (Idowu, 1985; Parr & Bradley, 1991; Williamson, 1982). It is not unusual that NWC students may find that some of their values are not compatible with the values of the host culture (Liberman, 1994). According to Liberman (1994), Asian students are critical of the informality of the classroom atmosphere in American universities. This may suggest some very basic differences in the philosophy of education and the nature of interpersonal relationships. Contrary to the more open and relaxed ways of classroom
teaching and learning on North American campuses, Asian universities usually are much more rigid in classroom regulations.

Influenced by Confucius philosophy of "teacher is the teacher, and student is the student", the Asian system carries a strong notion of professor-student distance to emphasize respect and order. In the Asian system, instructional structure basically follows a "professor-providing and student-receiving" model, and there is a set of strict classroom rules. Therefore, Asian students may feel very puzzled and confused when they face frequent classroom discussions and student presentations. They may also regard other students' deeds of eating and drinking during class hours as very disrespectful behaviour toward the professor. It is unimaginable in Asian universities that a professor and a student call each other by their first-names (Chen, 1999b).

NWC students encounter the same type of situation both on and off campus. They find that they are strangers and outsiders to the host culture, and they may not possess the knowledge to deal with some supposedly very simple and basic life events. For examples, asking someone "how are you doing today" does not really mean that you are concerned with the other person's status of health. Also, showing humility and modesty may be perceived by others as incompetence. The acculturation process may involve many conflicts that can impact culturally based self-identity, self-confidence, prior social class status, and so on (Ishiyama, 1989, 1995; Westwood & Ishiyama, 1990, 1991).

Social Isolation

Social isolation is another common phenomenon with this group (Pedersen, 1991b). NWC students may find themselves losing significant social relations when they first arrive
in North America (Hayes & Lin, 1994). There is evidence that NWC students suffer from a higher level of social alienation than students from the host culture (Owie, 1982). The sense of alienation and isolation makes one feel unsettled in a new place. Difficulties in acculturation such as value and lifestyle conflicts (Parr & Bradley, 1991) may increase the intensity of social isolation. As NWC students feel themselves "unfit" with North American lifestyle, they may feel reluctant to get actively involved in social situations and make new friends in the host culture (Pedersen, 1991b). International students are often more lonely and cautious than their America counterparts (Parr & Bradley, 1991). There is a close connection between the NWC students' stress level and the available social support resources (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992b; Ying & Liese, 1991).

Feelings of alienation toward the new environment could worsen the degree of social isolation, and vice versa. The continuous state of isolation and loneliness may reinforce the sense of helplessness among NWC students. When a NWC student is under a difficult adaptation situation and finds few available channels for help, he or she is likely to suffer from depression. Research has shown that social isolation, feelings of alienation and loneliness have a close connection with depression and stress among NWC students (Ebbin & Blankenship, 1986; Svarney, 1989).

In a study of international students' network patterns and cultural stress, Olaniran (1993) discovered that the number of people (i.e., "quantity" of people) that an international student can maintain close interpersonal ties with can be a significant determinant of his or her level of acculturation. The larger the quantity of people in the international students' social circle, the lower the level of alienation and isolation will be in their life, and vice
versa. The level of social support can play an important function in NWC students’ overall transition in the new cultural context.

A large hurdle new immigrants face is the lack of career knowledge and employment skills (Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991). To alter such disadvantages, NWC students need to gain the necessary competence (Mak, Westwood, & Ishiyama, 1994) which will facilitate their career pursuit in the host culture. One of the most effective ways to acquire cross-cultural "moxie" (Amundson, 1996b) in one’s career construction is no doubt through active integration with, rather than isolation from the current social environment.

Lack of social contact hinders the life career development of people of Western culture origins since networking is a key element in the career-making process (Amundson, 1996b). It is understandable that the lack of social contact hits NWC people harder as they try to search for, and build a career path in a new sociocultural context. This suggests that if NWC students increase their awareness and practice of networking and social contact, a healthy cycle will begin to emerge. That is, the more they contact with the society, the more social support they may get, the less they feel that they are isolated, and the more coping resources they may obtain with regard to knowledge and skills for career progress and success.

Financial Concern

Financial concern is a practical and critical issue in NWC students’ daily life. Without adequate financial resources, one’s basic survival would be questionable. The financial factor has been considered as one of the essential elements which can have significant impact on NWC students’ adjustment to the new environment (Idowu, 1985;

The change of status from a self-sufficient income provider to a fulltime student studying abroad is a significant transformation of economic status. To some students this transformation initiates a consumption of available resources. To others, this change requires the search for and obtaining of outside resources (e.g. funding from public or private institutions, support from family and relatives, working parttime to support oneself, etc.). The availability and maintenance of financial resources can have a significant impact on people's perception of their self-structure and its effective coping with the host culture environment. For example, encountering the fiscal challenge or making budgetary adjustments may well become a part of planning and sense-making in NWC students' academic career path. Further, the economic situation of the family must also be taken into consideration in career planning.

Racial Discrimination And Prejudice

In addition to what have been identified thus far, there are other concerns within the sociocultural domain such as racial discrimination and prejudice (Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991). While intentional intolerance against ethnic minorities still exists, racial discrimination may largely be generated by unintentional prejudice in the host culture (Pedersen, 1991b, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1990). Pedersen (1995) contends that racism is still highly visible in social institutions such as schools and universities in the United States. Not only should the phenomenon of racial discrimination be recognized, but its influence in
personal and social life should also be recognized.

Racial prejudice can have a derailing effect on the NWC students' healthy acculturation process. It may serve to worsen what is already felt and perceived as negative. It "can result in internalized or externalized anger, helplessness, reverse racial and ethnic prejudice toward the mainstream cultural group, and other forms of unresolved practical and emotional issues" (Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991, p. 134). This denotes the connection between NWC persons' psychological well-being and the influence of racial prejudice from the host society. The awareness, psychological preparation, and practical means of dealing with the possible occurrence of racial prejudice may become an important part in one's life career development. Experiences rendered from this process may contribute significantly to one's meaning-making in the cross-cultural adjustment and transition.

Summary

The foregoing literature review of precipitating factors of individuals' life career development, transition to higher education, and cross-cultural adjustment depicts a complex picture. Each variable plays an important role in the overall schema.

It has been suggested that career development is a lifelong process, during which a person takes on different roles and deals with dynamic changes and transitions. Life means career, and people frame and reframe their self-structure, and exercise their agentic enactment in constructing their life career path. Thus, career development is about the interaction between the person and his or her environment. The traditional theoretical approaches tend to focus on observable process, or objective career, in the person-environment relationship. Although still relevant, the objective career alone does not provide
sufficient explanation about what career means to the actor who functions as an agent in the process.

This calls for the understanding of people’s subjective meaning making, or subjective career, within diverse contexts. In light of more recent theoretical explanations and research on subjective career, constructivist-oriented notions regarding contextual complexity and multiplicity, narrative construction, and meaning interpretation, have been examined. It is assumed that NWC persons’ career evolution encompasses these variables and features; these factors are reflected by a complex person-context interweaving process from which NWC persons draw meanings for their life career missions, and construct their ways of being in the host culture.

In addition to these general characteristics of life career journey, NWC persons and students encounter unique cross-cultural adjustment issues when they initiate or rebuild their career passages in North American society. This adjustment experience tends to be intertwined in the meaning making process, and it occurs within the context of higher education. While the general aspects featuring the transition to university life are relevant to delineate the adjustment process, NWC students’ transition to higher education in the Western society comprises some other factors which especially reflect phenomena and dynamics entangled in cross-cultural adjustment.

These psychosocial factors associated with this unique transitional experience become active ingredients of the total life career ecology. Integrating major cross-cultural adjustment factors into the entire investigation, therefore, may help to highlight and enrich the scope of this study, that is, to understand NWC counsellor trainees’ subjective perspectives and
experiences concerning their life transition and career development in the Western sociocultural context. As a result, a portrait of how NWC counsellor trainees make sense of their career development in Canada may surface.

In summary then, NWC counsellor trainees’ experience in the higher education environment manifests an interactive relationship between various prospects of career development, transition to university life, and cross-cultural adjustment. Since transition to higher education and cross-cultural adjustment can be considered as parts of NWC students’ whole life career construction, they reflect essential psychological dynamics such as self-concepts, human agency, role and identity change, and meaning making, which are accompanying persons’ entire life career span. In this sense, to understand NWC counsellor trainees’ coping experience in transition and adjustment is to make sense of their endeavours in career construction.

Research focusing on this particular coping experience needs to take into consideration the complex interplay between these variables. By the same token, the research methodology should aim at designing a frame that is more facilitating and meaningful to examine the interrelationships. With these notions in mind, the next chapter of this dissertation explains the design and methodology of the study.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rationale and Epistemology

This study uses a qualitative research design. The selection of such a design is based on the assumption that this approach conforms more closely with the main purpose of this study, that is, to obtain a detailed account of the various facets of a NWC counsellor trainee's experience. Thus, the central thrust of the present research project is to explore, describe and seek to better understand the NWC counsellor trainees' life career development in a cross-cultural context.

A qualitative research frame is relevant to this particular study given that qualitative approaches are more concerned with understanding the process in which people make meaning of their lives (Bernard, 1994; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Wolcott, 1985). As a major type of qualitative methodology, ethnographic field work will be utilized in the study. The research design will follow a case study frame in general, and a narrative exploration in particular (Cochran, 1990; Collin & Young, 1992; Young & Friesen, 1994). As a major form of qualitative research, ethnography "has been concerned with producing descriptions and explanations of particular phenomena, or with developing theories rather than with testing existing hypotheses" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 25). Thus, ethnographic research includes a range of qualitative research methods such as participant observation and phenomenological interview in studying human experiences and actions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

A distinctive value of this type of research is that it opens the avenue for a deep and broad self-exploration. The journey of self-exploration allows and requires the integration
of an individual’s subjective experience which is essential to explain what, why, and how related elements have interacted with one another, and formed such an experience. Subjective experience is critical here because it provides personal contexts in which the experience has occurred and is perceived. When stories are told within their particular contexts, they become meaningful to both narrators and listeners. This should lead to a more thorough explanation of the experience being examined, and possibly a deeper understanding of the experience. Ethnography cares greatly, and focuses intensively on the individual’s subjective accounts as the primary source of information for investigation.

It should be acknowledged that my inclination to select an ethnographic research framework is based on my epistemological view about what my present study is designed to accomplish. I believe strongly that whatever methodologies are adopted, the key principle should be that there is a congruence between the design and the core purpose of the research project. The essence of this study, in my view, rests on the basic foundation of knowing what has happened in one’s life, and making some sense out of these events. In other words, I am interested in learning how another human being experiences life and career, and how he/she thinks and feels about that experience. My intention is not to "study" other human beings, but rather, to engage in the ethnographic research process so that I am in a position to learn from others. From the same perspective, I see the participants/informants in my project as my research partners or co-researchers rather than "subjects" to be studied.

Truly knowing another person’s experience is a challenging task. There is little doubt that unless the researcher endeavours to get as close to that knowing as possible, this mission of learning about the other person’s feelings and thinking may be fruitless.
Therefore, the research design should create the most pertinent conditions for this unique learning objective to be achieved. The use of ethnographic research frame is intended to better facilitate the task of knowing, and to make the learning process a rich, illuminating, and constructive experience for both the participants and the researcher.

That ethnographic field work appears to be particularly appropriate for this study is reflected by the nature of ethnography. According to Spradley (1979), ethnography is a type of research that is concerned with "the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand" (p.5). Although there are several methods, such as participant observation and the phenomenological interview, representing field work typology, the central research goal in ethnography remains the same. That is, use these field work instruments coherently with research participants in different settings to describe and interpret the meaning from the narrative data. In short, meaning exploration and meaning making are the distinct characteristics and primary functions that ethnography holds in shaping research. Since my central goal for the present study is to delineate and understand meanings that are rendered from NWC counsellor trainees' life career stories, it became apparent to me that utilizing ethnographic field work approach is germane to the study.

**Design**

The general design of this study adopts the field research approach, namely, an ethnographic or in-depth interview technique to acquire narrative data that will be re-written as an analytical description of NWC counsellor trainees' life career experience. This particular method is intended to let the participants' have an opportunity to recount their experiences and viewpoints. Through the phenomenological interview process, the
participants/informants' personal stories will be gathered as the primary source of information for analysis. This design attempts to accommodate the comprehension of a complex social phenomenon, i.e., the life career pathway of NWC counsellor trainees. Based on this foundation, I as the researcher will work collaboratively with my co-researchers/informants in generating a general narrative which summarizes and reflects the main themes of each story told. Consequently, implications for theory and practice will be obtained from the general narrative.

As a major research form in social science, field research in its very nature concentrates on first-hand, on-the-spot, and real-life investigation. Phenomenological perspectives are not avoided, but intensely incorporated into the inquiry process. A variety of approaches with a qualitative orientation fall within the field work category, namely, ethnography, single-case/multiple-case study, interpretative procedures, qualitative research, etc. The core of this type of research is its attempt to probe and understand the meaning of events for the people involved (Burgess, 1984).

This study combines the features of multiple-case research and phenomenological narrative collection. The field work, i.e., the ethnographic interviewing process, is considered vital to the whole research plan since it is the channel for the narrative data to be gathered. Mishler (1986) states that the relevance of this interview process is that it provides the research participants/informants with the opportunity to tell stories which are meaningful in their lives.

Collection and analysis of narrative data take into account the informants' personal experiences and viewpoints. The function of narrative is expected to contribute significantly
to social knowledge "...that deepens and enlarges the understanding of human existence" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 159). The narrative process allows the informants to contribute directly to the building of the knowledge about themselves. As Polkinghorne (1988) points out, narrative is "...the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful. Narrative meaning is a cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes" (p.1).

When either main themes from each individual narrative/case are drawn to construct the general narrative, or themes from the general narrative are examined for their implications to theory, research, and practice, meaning interpretation becomes pivotal. It is not feasible to mark a "theme" without identifying the central meaning it represents. Sullivan's (1984) notion of critical interpretation appears to be applicable in this respect. Sullivan (1984) contends that human action should be understood within the social context as human freedom is limited by the social structure it exists. Given the awareness of such social context, Sullivan (1984) recommends a critical negotiation of descriptions with informants, and the expression of an emancipatory praxis. That is, make interpretations and suggestions for change to enhance human agency.

The nature of such a research frame requires and emphasizes a joint effort by both the researcher and the participants. As was underscored earlier, I as the researcher am a learner and a participant. One can never truly learn something until he or she takes part in the learning activity. The process of ethnographic narrative data collection and analysis itself can be perceived as the learning process, in which stories are told and recorded, and the meaning of the stories are interpreted. The researcher is not a passive observer, but rather,
an active participant who affects and is affected by the learning process. From the beginning to the end of the research project, the researcher and the co-researchers/informants direct their endeavour toward a common goal, that is, to make sense and meaning out of what has been presented in the descriptions of the co-researchers' experiences.

This calls for the attention to reflexivity, an essential characteristic in the present research design. Reflexivity refers to the on-going contemplation, review, and analysis through the whole research process, which not only takes into account the informants' experiences and vistas but also the researcher's influence in it. Acknowledgement and awareness of reflexivity are fundamental to ethnographic research since in data collection it is impossible to "isolate a body of data uncontaminated by the researcher", and to turn the researcher "into an automation or into a neutral vessel of cultural experience" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.16).

In illustrating the existence and function of reflexivity in social research, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that factors associated with the researcher such as sociocultural backgrounds, values, interests, social processes, personal characteristics, and production of knowledge, can all be influential to data collection and interpretation. Hence, the principles of reflexivity need to be recognized, and integrated into the research design. As the researcher being involved in the exploration and meaning making, it is particularly important for me to keep a sense of, and intentionally revisit the canons of reflexivity repeatedly through the entire research process. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) have stated:

There is no doubt that reflexivity is a significant feature of social research. Indeed, there is a sense in which all social research takes the form of participant observation: it
involves participating in the social world, in whatever role, and reflecting on the products of that participation (p. 17).

With the increasing awareness of reflexivity in the research process, the construction and re-construction of narratives become closer to real life situations that entail influences from both the co-researchers and researcher with regard to the outcomes, i.e., the individual stories, the general narrative, and their implications to theory, research, and practice. Meaning interpretation, thus, becomes the true product of a shared attempt between my informants and myself.

**Personal Reflections**

My own experiences as a NWC counsellor trainee for the last 9 years has been the primary reason that spurred my interest in the current research project. I was born and grew up in the city of Shanghai, China. During the 1980s, I obtained a 2-year (full-time study) college diploma in China, and then a B.A. degree in the United States, both in the field of Business Administration and Management. During the intervals of my undergraduate studies (4 years), I worked as a senior supervisor, and an acting manager in the late-shift, for the sales department of a major hotel in Shanghai. Like the NWC counsellor trainees in this study, neither my academic training nor my career experience had a direct association with the profession of counselling psychology. My vocational speciality featured managerial responsibilities in a business context.

In retrospect, I have no doubt about my strong desire for change when I first came to North America in the middle of 1980s for continuing higher education. A key inspiration for my action was my older brother who, at the time, had just obtained his B.S. degree from one of the most prestigious universities in the U.S., started his career as an engineer
at a major U.S. corporation, and planned to start a part-time pursuit for a MBA (Master of Business Administration) degree. When I completed my B.A. degree in the United States, my career goal seemed to be crystal clear, that was, to pursue an MBA degree in one of the "Ivy-league" schools in the USA. At the time, this simple intention defined the total meaning of the term "career" for me, and there was virtually nothing else with respect to my future planning. I spent a huge amount of time, effort, and some of my financial resources to implement this plan.

Unfortunately, my effort ended in vain. By consulting with a university professor in the U.S., who was one of my best mentors and friends, I started to re-think seriously my career direction. The conversations between us was an enlightening experience that opened up my mind and eyes. I came to realize that my "only goal" for an MBA degree was too narrow, and it prematurely excluded many potentially viable options from my career search. In broadening my prospective preferences, a range of majors of graduate studies emerged. These new alternatives included not only subject matters that were associated with my prior academic and professional backgrounds, but also those that would reflect my long-time personal interest in becoming an educator or working in the field of education. Parallel to the widening in subject selection, my geographical search scope also expanded to include graduate schools across the North American continent as well as some European universities.

I was successful in obtaining admission to a variety of graduate programs at the London School of Economics/the University of London (U.K.), University of Birmingham (U.K.), University of Vienna (Austria), Oregon State University (USA), and University of
Ottawa (Canada). After careful consideration, I accepted the offer from Canada, and came to University of Ottawa (OU) majoring in the Master's program in Educational Administration, a discipline that seemed to accommodate both my background in administration and management, and my interest in education. My initial studies in the subject went well due to my previous knowledge in the general field of administration and management. However, something happened that dramatically changed my career direction, and I found myself becoming a counsellor trainee.

This critical incident occurred during my second semester at OU, while I was taking two courses in the program of educational counselling as electives. Having had virtually no previous knowledge about the term "counselling", this major of study caught my attention when I was reading through the brochure concerning graduate programs in education. The program sounded interesting even though I still had little idea about the nature of counselling. It was difficult for me to go through these two counselling courses. I was often frustrated with the fact that I did not know even the most basic information.

The more time and effort I devoted to my learning, the more I was attracted to the subject matter, and the more competent I became in my studies. Having experienced a very facilitative training climate, especially the guidance, support, and encouragement from the two professors I met in these two courses, I managed to "stumble through" this initial learning process, and received excellent assignment evaluations. I was particularly encouraged by the fact that my final grade for one of the courses was an "A +", one of the only two such scores in the class. The in-depth self-understanding I gained from this learning experience convinced me that I had found a career calling upon which I could truly
devote my heart as well as stretch my personal potential. By the end of that semester, I officially switched my major of studies to the educational counselling program.

After the completion of my Master's degree at OU, I came to the University of British Columbia (UBC) continuing my further academic and professional pursuit in the field, first as a M.A. level trainee qualifying for doctoral degree studies, and then as a doctoral student. These learning experiences coincided with my heavy involvement as a trainer and educator in counselor education. A regular instructor for the last 7 and a half years in counselling psychology at UBC, I have been teaching a variety of course subjects such as Career Counselling, School Guidance and Counselling, and Theories in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

In reflecting the multicultural environment in Canada, especially in the Greater Vancouver region, the counselling psychology program at UBC attracts individuals with various ethnic cultural backgrounds. In every class I taught, I worked with these trainees, many of whom were new immigrants or international students. I found myself playing the dual-role of being both a participant and spectator in my academic life on campus: participant in a sense that I myself was a counselor trainee from a non-Western culture; spectator in the sense that I observed how my students from non-Western cultures coped with their new learning and training experiences in counselling psychology in a Canadian university. The more I was engaged in this dual-role, the more interest I developed toward NWC trainees' life career experiences. It emerged naturally as my first preference among several potential dissertation topics. My decision to explore the topic was further reinforced by a preliminary search of literature which indicated that there seemed to be a lack of
research in the existing literature regarding NWC experiences in this type of context.

Coming to Canada as an international student, and then becoming a new Canadian citizen who continued his career pursuit in counsellor training, I felt that I truly shared many of the experiences of my research participants in this study. To some extent, I am "studying the experience of myself". I was fully aware of, and constantly reminded of this reality through the entire research process. I felt that this level of self-consciousness was important as the reality of my familiarity and closeness to NWC counsellor trainees' experiences generated both advantages and disadvantages in my research endeavour.

The optimal part was that this reality provided me with an ideal perspective in this type of ethnographic research, as I was an "expert" who had already had similar experiences to those of my research participants. I did not have to spend extra time and effort in order to become a "participant observer" before I could proceed fully with my research data collection. A big advantage was the fact that I had a real understanding of how my participants might feel about their experiences. I benefited from this circumstance in many ways during the research process. For example, it was easier for me to (a) build a rapport with my informants, (b) either lead or follow what was described in the interview process, and (c) articulate and translate what had been said into the form of narratives. For me, the greatest reward was that whether during the processes of interviews or my writing of narratives, I could hardly feel that I was "studying them", but rather, I was sharing with my colleagues a period of self-recollection and self-reflection that we all cherished and understood.

I also had to realize that there were some disadvantages inherent in the research
process because I was so "close" to the experiences of the participants. The easiest mistake to make as the researcher could be the conscious or unconscious attempts in describing and interpreting the participants' experiences with a certain set point of view. Consequently, my biases, which were based mainly on my personal experience as a NWC counsellor trainee, could lead to instances of under-describing or over-emphasizing, or even misinterpreting some points in constructing the individual stories.

The pros and cons in this sense were like the two sides of the same coin. The challenge for me was how to maintain my active and vigorous role as an ethnographic writer, while constantly reminding myself of my biases, and making an effort to keep an open mind on all matters.

In addition to the above aspect, my perspectives and thinking that influenced this study also reflected my active involvement for the past 7 and a half years in teaching and studying issues in the field of career choice and development, and career counselling. I see individuals' life and career as an integral part that can not, and should not, be separated from one the other. In this view, career pursuit is a life-long journey composed of different contents and contexts.

Influenced heavily by the social constructivist worldview, I believe that both social and personal contexts, as well as persons' individualized meanings associated or rendered from these contexts, are of essential importance in explaining and making sense of human actions and/or reactions in this life-span process. Within this larger picture, some aspects relevant to issues such as transition to a new higher education system and cross-cultural adjustment in a new environment, were explored.
Selection of Participants/Informants

The participants/informants for this study are female and male counsellor trainees from non-Western cultures. They are 21 years of age or older who have enrolled or finished a counsellor education and/or counselling and guidance training program in a university in the province of British Columbia. According to Mishler (1986), in order to obtain optimum results in a research project with a multiple-case study orientation, it is advisable to incorporate a minimum of 8 informants' case material into the design. Considering the nature of the present study and the accessibility of the target population, 8 informants participated in this research.

A core consideration in ethnographic field work is the issue of accessibility, that is, the researcher needs to obtain the direct and on-site access to research data, e.g., research setting, target population, etc. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). It is obvious that because the target population for this study is a narrowly defined, very focused, and unique group, the spectrum for selection of participants is limited. The researcher's priority in participant selection, then, is to concentrate on the factors such as relevance of experience, approachability, availability, and willingness to participate.

Spradley (1979, p. 46) suggested five basic criteria in selecting a competent informant in ethnographic field work. They include: (1) thorough enculturation, i.e., at least a year of full time involvement with a cultural scene; (2) current involvement in a cultural scene; (3) involvement with an unfamiliar cultural scene, i.e., not many people are familiar with such a scene; (4) adequate time to participate in the study; and (5) informants should be both analytical and non-analytical in their descriptions of their experiences, i.e.,
analytical in a sense of being able to analyze their own experience and culture, and non-
analytical in a sense of keeping their feeling and thinking as insiders within their experience
and culture. To use these five criteria as reference points, I set up the following general
requirements for participant selection for this study.

(1) *Thorough enculturation.* Each informant must be an adult (at least 21 years of
age) who came to Canada from a non-Western country. It should be noted that the definition
of "non-Western countries" in this study refers to a country or region other than the
European nations, New Zealand, Australia, and north American countries, namely, Canada
and the United States. Similarly, the term "Western culture" in this study refers to the main
stream culture in the Western countries specified above. This definition of NWC was based
on Hall’s (1981) differentiation concerning the High Context (HC) cultures and Low Context
(LC) cultures. Since the cultural scene in this study is that of NWC individuals, this
requirement guarantees that the informant must have been involved in a "non-Western
culture" for at least 20 or more years in his/her life.

(2) *Current involvement.* Each informant must have been enrolled in a counsellor
education and/or counselling and guidance program in a Canadian university at the time of
participating in the ethnographic interview. My assumption here is that a longer experience
may help informants with their exploration and reflection.

It should be noted that an informant who has finished his/her counselling diploma
or degree program within 3 years at the time of interview is also considered an eligible
member of the target population group. I assume here that the length of the time is within
reasonable reach for a good and sufficient retrospective.
(3) Involvement with an unfamiliar cultural scene. This requirement can be ensured by the fact that only NWC counsellor trainees will be eligible to take part in this study.

(4) Adequate time to participate in the study. Each informant was required to devote 90 to 120 minutes to the interview, plus time for later reflection and review of the individual narratives.

(5) Informants’ analytical and non-analytical capacity in their descriptions of their experiences. Spradley’s (1979) intent was to emphasize the importance for the informant to truly tell stories from his/her perspective, and stick with this insider’s version of the narrative.

Recruitment of informants. Prospective informants were located through two channels, namely, public recruitment and informal referrals. In the public recruitment situation, a "Letter of Initial Contact" (see Appendix A) which explains the nature of the present research and the main principles for informant selection was distributed within a large university context. The specific places included the department office of the counselling psychology program, classrooms, and campus counselling and student resource centers. This approach was intended to lead to direct contact with the would-be participants.

The informal referral was often a more reliable and effective channel to reach potential informants. As contacts were made through friends, colleagues, acquaintances, etc., this method had the parallel effect of snowball sampling suggested by Bernard (1994). For example, a present colleague may introduce me to a former classmate who happens to be a NWC counsellor trainee, whom may provide me with the information of how to contact another person who has a similar cultural background. Under the informal contact
circumstances, the "Letter of Initial Contact" (see Appendix A) was sent or delivered to the prospective informant so they may be better informed by the written material. I then sent each of the chosen informant a "Consent Form" (See Appendix B), and reminded him/her to read the entire form carefully.

Based on the selection criteria mentioned above, a total of 14 eligible potential informants who were current or former counsellor trainees in the counselling psychology program at the University of British Columbia were contacted. Initially 10 individuals in this group expressed their interest in the current research project, and agreed to join the study. However, one of the informants in this 10-person group decided not to participate before the actual interviews began as she realized that because of her busy schedule at the time, it would be difficult for her to make the time commitment for both the interview and the review of the individual narrative. Another informant withdrew from the project after she had attended the initial interview. This informant was interested in the project, but had some concerns over the issue of confidentiality; she expressed her anxiety that other people may still recognize who she was even though her real name would not be used in the study.

Eight informants participated in all aspects of the research, i.e., each of them attended the interview, reviewed and verified the individual story I had written based on the interview contents, and provided his or her feedback on the individual story regarding two aspects: (a) the content accuracy in his or her story, and (b) the suggested revisions I could adopt to improve the accuracy and quality of my descriptions and expressions in each story.

Of the eight informants taking part in the study, five were new immigrants who had made Canada their new homes, and the other three were international students who intended
to go back to their home countries after completing their counsellor training. The two youngest informants were 27 and 32 years old, respectively, while the oldest informant was 55. The rest of the five informants were between 38 to 47 years of age. All of them had lived in Canada at least for two years, while half of the group had lived in Canada between 5 to 10 years. Two of the informants were trainees at the guidance diploma level, while the other six were Master’s level trainees. Six of the informants had either completed their training for a year, or were approaching the end of their Master’s degree program. Only one of the eight informants had just completed his first-year training at the time of the interview.

Demographics

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Located in the three continents of Asia, Africa, and South America, the eight informants' countries/hometowns of origin included Japan, Hong Kong, Kenya, a Middle East nation, Mexico, and Argentina. The cultural background of these recruited informants complied with the definition of "Non-Western Culture (NWC)" adopted for this study. As mentioned earlier, in defining the meaning of NWC, I utilized Hall's (1981) differentiation concerning the High Context (HC) cultures and Low Context (LC) cultures.

According to Hall (1981), social interactions and interpersonal communications in HC cultures depend largely on the "preprogrammed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message" (p. 101). On the contrary, human exchanges in the LC cultures require that most of the information be in the process in order to make the context more informative and comprehensive to all the individuals and groups involved in the communication process.

The HC cultures are featured by attributes such as unity, cohesiveness, continuity, and slowness to change. The LC cultures, on the other hand, emphasize individuality and rapid change. "HC people can be creative within their own system but have to move to the bottom of the context scale when dealing with anything new, whereas LC people can be quite creative and innovative when dealing with the new but have trouble being anything but pedestrian when working within the bounds of old systems" (Hall, 1981, p. 127). Another noticeable difference between the two is that the bonds between people are very strong in the HC cultures, while in the LC cultures such bonds are rather fragile. As a result, it is easier for confrontations to occur in the LC cultures than in the HC cultures. Similarly, the LC cultures can often be more vulnerable to violent disturbance than the HC cultures.
To use Hall’s (1981) key notions here, cultures that bear the characteristics of a high context culture will be considered as meeting the defining criteria of NWC in this study. All European countries, North American countries (i.e., Canada and the USA), Australia and New Zealand, are excluded from the definition for NWC. It should be noted that some groups in these nations such as aboriginal peoples and other indigenous and ethnic minority groups may well belong to the domain of high context cultures. Therefore, to define the term NWC can be a very complex task, and can become even much more challenging and intricate in a multicultural society such as Canada. It is beyond the scope of the present study to open a lengthy discussion on the topic concerning how to define the term NWC more appropriately and accurately.

The term NWC used in this study merely intends to set up approximate and general geographic lines between the countries of high context cultures and low context cultures in the world. Such general differentiation is intended for the convenience of having some basic criteria for informant selection. Following this thinking process, only the main-stream and more dominant low context cultures in the countries mentioned in the above paragraph were taken into consideration while defining them as not belonging to the domain of NWC nations in this study. As a result, only informants who were originally from a country other than the countries listed in the above paragraph were considered as NWC individuals, and were eligible to participate in this study.

**Interview Process**

Each interview was scheduled at a location and time that would be convenient to the participant. Only one of the informants chose to be interviewed at his home. The other
informants were interviewed in the counselling psychology department. Before each interview, I would explain to the interviewee the purpose and the nature of the interview. The content of the "Consent Form" (see Appendix B) was reiterated, clarified, and fully explained so the interviewee would clearly understand what was going to happen during the research process. Every interview session was audiotaped. The length for the interview session varied with each informant, lasting between one and a half to two and a half hours.

The process of the interview followed the principal ideas of a semi-structured interview format (Bernard, 1994). That is, each interview focused mainly on a range of general "theme" questions that would give each informant more room to say what he/she felt important about issues, while following the general frame of the research intent concerning the major progression of a narrative in the present study. For example, I told each informant very clearly that the interview was going to follow a 3-phase sequential order, i.e., his or her life career experiences before coming to Canada, transitional experiences during the initial period of coming to live in Canada, and his/her experiences of becoming a counsellor trainee in a Canadian university. The 3-phase sequence was intended to gear the general flow of each individual story more closely to the temporal and developmental stream of the beginning, the middle, and the end of a story line. This explanation helped to set up a general yet explicit picture of where and how each story would unfold and proceed. It gave each informant both a clear sense of the required overall structure of the story he/she was going to tell, and more liberty to choose and organize the contents that he/she felt would be necessary to fill in the gaps and links within such a general structure.
The semi-structured interview format was consistent with the principal philosophy of constructing a narrative that would be meaningful to each individual. Following this interview methodology, I intentionally introduced to and reminded each informant of the particular phase we were in at the onset of each narrative stage, i.e., the beginning, the middle, or the end. Several major theme questions were prepared for each of the three major life career phases of my informants. Some additional questions (see Appendix C) were prepared under some of the major theme question categories such as basic personal information regarding country of origin, birthplace, and age.

Using an open and casual atmosphere, I brought up the main theme questions that needed to be explored as the interview session was progressing. Each informant was encouraged to follow his/her flow of thinking in recalling his/her life career events such as personal life and worklife situations before coming to Canada, reasons for choosing to pursue counsellor education, and experiences that had been encountered since entering or through the postsecondary counsellor training program in Canada. My role in the interview process was basically as an active listener. That is, I would listen attentively to what the informant had revealed about his or her life career story. In addition to inserting "theme questions" whenever necessary, my main task was to accompany my informant going through his or her story line by paraphrasing, restating, repeating, and clarifying what he/she had said. While making sure that each informant would be the main speaker in the process, and he/she would have the maximum amount of the interview time he/she might need, I found myself from time to time sharing a little bit of my personal experiences and viewpoints on some of the issues while trying to illuminate what the informant had said. My
purpose for such sharing was aimed only at assisting both my informant and myself to better understand what had been disclosed and communicated in the informant’s description regarding his/her experiences. Also, I would initiate such mutual sharing under the circumstance of a need. For example, I would share some of my experiences and thinking when the informant required more information to answer a question, or when he/she got "stuck" during the description. Consequently, these brief moments of sharing appeared to not only facilitate the informant’s openness and flow in recollecting his/her account, but also to increase the rapport between the informant and myself.

Some of the theme questions were framed as follows: (1) Could you tell me about your life and work experiences before coming to Canada? (2) In general, how would you describe your personal life and career experiences back in your home country? (3) Could you describe to me your initial living experiences in Canada? (4) What did you encounter when you first came to this country (Canada)? (5) Could you tell me about your experiences in counsellor training? (6) What happened in your (counsellor) training? (7) What was it like to be a counsellor trainee? (8) How would you assess your experience thus far as a counsellor trainee? (9) What does this experience mean to you in your life career development?

Many of these questions overlapped to some extent. This was a deliberate attempt to bring the informant’s attention to the fullness and richness of his/her experience in counsellor training, and the life career meanings associated with such an experience. While the three phases of individual experiences were clearly divided, questions as above did not necessarily always follow a precise sequential order. They were also flexible as to wording,
and they could be rephrased in case the meaning of the questions was unclear to the informant. My general stance was to keep my questions to a minimum.

Data Analysis

In describing the design of qualitative research, Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (1993) stress the importance of keeping an open-end toward method in general and data analysis in particular. This is because "...although all proposals must begin with some clear question or set of questions that can be answered only by describing and understanding a bounded slice of the world, neither the specific focus of inquiry nor the exact and final form of method and analysis can be specified in advance for most qualitative studies" (p. 112). "It is impossible to predict the exact form the data will take or what aspects of the data will present themselves as worthy of attention" (p. 238).

Analysis of ethnographic field work does not really start at the phase of "data analysis", or in other words, strictly after the period of data collection in a traditional sense. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) have pointed out:

In ethnography the analysis of data is not a distinct stage of the research. In many ways, it begins in the pre-fieldwork phase, in the formulation and clarification of research problems, and continues through to the process of writing reports, articles, and books. Formally, it starts to take shape in analytic notes and memoranda; informally, it is embodied in the ethnographer's ideas and hunches. And in these ways, to one degree or another, the analysis of data feeds into research design and data collection (p. 205).

As such, data analysis can always be perceived as an integral part through the whole research process. This feature of analysis is very much explained and mirrored by reflexivity in ethnographic field work.

In this study, the transcripts from ethnographic interviews were the primary sources for analysis. To continue the data collection process, the first step I took was to transcribe
the audio tapes. As a result, one full written transcript was prepared for each interview session, and a total of 8 transcripts were produced from the 8 interviews that had been previously conducted. Based on the content of the written transcript, I wrote a "third-person" story/narrative for each informant (i.e., to use "he/she" to indicate the informant in the description). This transcript-preparation and story-writing process was time-consuming but also a useful way to present the information to the participants. The general research process was as follows: (1) I wrote the individual story for each informant, (2) the story was sent to each informant for validation, (3) each informant provided his/her feedback and comments on the first draft of the story, and (4) I incorporated each informant's suggestions and requests into my revision, and the second informant-validated version of the individual story was completed.

Based on the interview transcripts, a general narrative was then developed grounded with the major themes emerged from the eight individual stories. The general narrative represents the final research product.

Writing the Individual Stories

The most challenging part of writing the individual stories was how to construct stories that would not only be truthful to the original content provided by each informant, but be organized in a clear and consistent manner for the potential readers. A substantial amount of work was done in re-organizing, re-grouping, and refining what had been manifested verbally in the original interview transcripts.

The first draft of each individual story was sent to the informants for validation. Arrangements for receiving feedback from the informants were made according to each
individual informant's convenience, e.g., an additional meeting, over the phone, and written communications via regular mails and E-mail, etc. Only minor changes were suggested and every attempt was made to make the necessary changes. After the revision was completed, I provided a few informants with a copy of the newly amended version of his/her story upon request. The other informants indicated that they would not need a revised copy of their stories since they had already communicated with me concerning the points for revision, and it was unnecessary for them to take a second look at these points in the revised version. One of the revised individual stories (i.e., the Story of GI) is presented in its full length in Chapter Four of this study. The other seven individual stories are also included in the same chapter, albeit in a summarized format.

At the time of these feedback contacts, 6 informants expressed their appreciation of their individual story. They indicated that the stories were well-written, reflecting truly what they had gone through during the three periods in their life career journey. Some informants stated that they had enjoyed reading their own stories as it was the first time in their lives that they had such an opportunity to review and savour the richness and fruitfulness of their past career experiences as both a participant and an observer. They reported that they were fascinated by reading their own stories.

Writing the General Narrative

The eight validated and fine-tuned individual stories provided a solid foundation upon which to develop the general narrative. As indicated earlier, the general narrative serves the function of reflecting and synthesizing the main characteristics of the individual stories, presenting to the readers an overview of the main themes.
The emerging themes from each individual story were identified and stored into a new file. The major themes and associated sub-themes were organized into the three chronological phases of experience relevant to the would-be general narrative, i.e. (1) the beginning phase would describe the informants’ brief life career histories and events before coming to Canada; (2) the middle phase would look at the informants’ initial experiences of coming to live in Canada either as new immigrants or as international students; and (3) the ending phase would focus on the informants’ experiences in their new career pursuit of becoming a counsellor trainee. Each of these phases comprised three to six major theme topics, and within each of these major theme topics, a series of sub-themes were included.

The challenge in this theme-identifying process was to maintain a balance between the principles of inclusion and selectiveness. While the general narrative did not attempt to include every piece of information from each individual story, there was a concerted effort to focus on those events that were viewed by participants as central to the meaning of their stories.

Theme finding and classification is by no means based solely on the imagination of the researcher. Rather, it is grounded on a set of concepts generated in the research process. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) have noted:

The initial task in analyzing qualitative data is to find some concepts that help us make sense of what is going on in the scenes documented by the data. Often we will not be sure why what is happening, and sometimes we may not even understand what is going on. The aim, though, is not just to make the data intelligible but to do so in an analytical way that provides a novel perspective on the phenomena we are concerned with or which promises to tell us much about other phenomena of similar types (p. 209).

Following Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1995, p. 211) suggestions, concepts underlying the themes reflected in each individual story were rendered by (1) the terms generated by the
informants themselves in the field work such as the interview in this study, (2) conceptual categories set by the ethnographer/researcher based on his/her general, common-sense knowledge and personal experience, and (3) borrowing or adopting existing concepts from related literature source. These three guidelines, which correspond to the principle of reflexivity, formed the foundation for identifying and coding the themes in the descriptions in this study.

The initial theme topics were unpolished and in relatively large quantity as I collected and inscribed in my "theme file" the expressions, terms, events, etc. from each individual story while reading through it. The next step, therefore, was to refine these potential themes. The themes were rearranged and combined into more well-defined, focused, and condensed big theme categories so that data analysis could be conducted in a more systematic and rational organization that would fit with the purpose and nature of the general narrative (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Because the major method for this study was the narrative approach, it was useful to take the narrative framework into consideration when organizing theme types. A narrative or story is "a symbolized account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension... a beginning, a middle, and an ending... The story is held together by recognizable patterns of events called plots. Central to the plot structure are human predicaments and attempted resolutions" (Sarbin, 1986, p.3). Themes were defined within key categories such as "yearning for change in life (before coming to Canada)"; "adapting to environment (during initial living adjustment in Canada)"; "getting started (after in engaging in counsellor training)"; etc. These major theme topics were identified and
organized in such a manner that only a few changes in wording were necessary as the general narrative was developed. A few more additions, deletions, and revisions were incorporated into the writing process with respect to sub-themes and other related contents. Such modifications seemed to not only help clarify and refine the sub-themes embedded in the general narrative, but enhance the senses of wholeness, completeness, richness, and most of all, meaningfulness, that the general narrative intended to convey.

Validation of the theme types continued through a triangulation, the process of comparing data from different sources such as information from different phases of the field work, from existing literature, from the informant him or herself, from other informants, and from myself as the researcher. Such triangulation "can be extended indefinitely by showing each participant the others' accounts and recording his or her comments on them" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 230). The interplay of all the related parties and aspects in the triangulation process would be important to data analysis. Needless to say the informants' viewpoints, such as their validation feedback on their individual stories, were a valuable source of triangulation. Similarly, as a reflexive ethnographic researcher, I was aware of the importance for me to be an observer and a writer. Instead of functioning as a "tape-recorder" or "note-transcriber", I would take the role as an author who constructs a meaningful general narrative grounded on my informants' experiences and my understanding of the experiences.

To summarize, writing the general story could be perceived as a second stage or higher degree refinement, whereby major themes that had formed each individual story were used as the backbone and flesh to construct a more general account. The final version of the
general narrative, hence, represents a more complete product from the field work. The making of the product has illustrated specifically the entire process of data analysis. In concluding such an analysis, research results have been rendered in the form of a general narrative of NWC trainees, i.e., the narrative presented in Chapter Five of this study. Consequently, the general narrative has become the resource from which findings and implications will be drawn, discussed, and appraised.
CHAPTER 4: INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES

This chapter presents the first part of the results, that is, the eight individual narratives of all the informants who participated in this study. Based on the original descriptions provided by each informant in the research interviews, these eight individual narratives will be presented separately. Presentation of case studies in such a manner allows for further exploration and comparison of similarities as well as differences reflected in the informants’ accounts of experiences. To truly characterize and report what each informant went through and how he or she was feeling about this unique experience, each story follows as closely as possible the initial descriptions and meanings rendered by each informant. With this principle in mind, what are frequently incorporated into this process of narration, whenever possible, are the informants’ original statements used during the interviews. Although each story is being told in the third-person, the story’s accuracy and truthfulness has been verified and validated by each respective informant. For anonymity, the informants’ real names have been replaced by pseudonyms. For abbreviation and terseness, only one of the stories (i.e., the story of GI) will be presented in its full length. The other seven stories will be presented in summary.
The Story of GI

Demographics

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Education:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prior Career:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years of Living in Canada:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years of Counsellor Training:</td>
<td>5 years (near completion of M.A.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Support:</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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GI was born and grew up in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. A father of a 9-year-old girl, GI was 46 years old at the time of this interview. He was in his third year of training as a Master's student in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

Beginning: Before Coming to Canada

The only child in his family, GI thinks that his birth was like "some kind of accident" to his parents who were already in their middle age at the time. "Both my parents were working class people, and I was raised in that kind of environment. My father's family immigrated from Northern Spain to Argentina at the beginning of the century. Although many family members from my mother's side were Spanish, there were some aboriginal people as well."

GI went to medical school, and obtained his medical degree from the University of Buenos Aires in 1976. He then studied rehabilitation medicine for another three years while working as a general physician. After finishing his studies in rehabilitation medicine, GI
became a specialist in the field for 8 years. In total, he worked as a physician for fourteen (14) years. "As a matter of fact, I didn’t want to become a medical doctor at all. I wanted to be a psychologist. But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, psychologists were seen as technicians working for physicians and psychiatrists in Argentina. A psychologist was basically regarded as just a helper who had less professional prestige by the society. So there was pressure from my family and friends. They said to me: 'well you should go into medicine studying psychiatry and then you are going to be the boss.' So I regrettably bought into this idea of being a physician. However, from my heart, I had a lot more personal interest in psychology than in medicine. I just followed the norm of the society and the expectations of others. Parallel to the external influences, there was an internal need within myself in this regard. I was having a low sense of self-validation. I hoped that to become a physician would help me increase my sense of self-worth. " The message that GI received from his family, social circles, community, and society was clear, that was, individuals should always put social prestige and status as the first priority in choosing a career direction. As a physician he was recognized as someone with a high social status, it was a favourable vocational path to pursue. Unfortunately, this career route did not result in much career satisfaction.

The original plan was to major in the study of psychiatry. After some volunteer work at a Mental Health Hospital in Buenos Aires, GI changed his mind, and decided not to pursue this discipline. "These were terrible experiences of actually seeing what were going on in that place. I felt that I really couldn’t work there because of the way that patients were treated by physicians, psychiatrists and other stuff. I worked in one of the psychiatric wards
as a volunteer medical student just for a few months, yeah, a very short time, but enough to make me feel totally scared about the environment. Then I decided that, well, it wasn’t for me. To make a long story short, patients were usually treated in a very, very patronizing and demeaning manner. Basically, they were regarded not as human beings, but as things, objects, or items." The observation of the reality in the workplace stirred deep soul-searching for GI. He felt that his position in life was "closer to those patients than to the doctors". He anticipated that his empathy and sympathy toward his patients could make it extremely difficult for him to work in this kind of organizational culture and workplace environment. Also, from a personal level, "feeling closer to patients than to those psychiatrists was something impossible for me to accept at that time because this was almost like accepting the fact that I might have the same kind of mental illness as those patients did. Otherwise, why did I take side with the patients most of the time?"

GI then decided to pursue general medicine, and became a competent practitioner. After accumulating a substantial amount of experience in dealing with acute patients, GI was considering switching his focus to a field where he could work with chronic illness. Rehabilitation medicine seemed to be an ideal option. He finally ended up working with leprosy patients in a rehabilitation centre, which was a unit of a colony-hospital, located in a rural community 90 kilometres from the capital city. There were no specialized helping professionals such as psychotherapists and counsellors in the realm of leprosy at that time in Argentina. As a doctor working in the field, GI found himself offering counselling and education to his patients with chronic illness, "and that was the part I truly enjoyed in my work. I enjoyed the helping and counselling part of my practice. I liked the tranquil working
environment and location as well. But I didn't appreciate so much the pure medical aspect of it." Professionally, GI was doing a competent job, but personally he was not satisfied with his work. "If I have to use a metaphor to describe how I felt with my work, it was more like using a mask for years and years: I was disguising myself as a physician, someone that I was really not in my heart. That made the whole thing very negative. I am not saying that there were no positive aspects associated with my fourteen-year work experience as a medical doctor. It was certainly a very good feeling of helping patients in need. Also, getting recognition for what I had done was somewhat rewarding. In the last three years I worked there, I was the head of the rehabilitation centre." Receiving positive recognition helped GI to increase his self-esteem. However, what he had achieved did not make him feel satisfied with his work. "I felt that I was faking in my life about who I was and who I really wanted to be. Something was missing. It was like a very important part of the parcel was missing in my life." This missing part was not identifiable at the time. GI came to this realization only after he had come to Canada and reflected on his past life career experiences. While in Argentina, he was not able to perceive the essentials of the matter for he "was too involved in the sociocultural system to be objective in seeing the real picture." Being a responsible professional, GI worked hard. Despite his lack of enthusiasm for the work, he pushed himself so that he would do the best job possible. "For me, this way of life was very tiresome and distressful. It became a burden."

GI's ex-wife was a naturalized Canadian citizen who went back to live in Argentina when she was a teenager. When the family decided to come back to Canada, GI came here as a landed immigrant. Although it was not a first-time experience to live in Canada for his
ex-wife, it was for GI. "The reason for coming to Canada was quite simple. We decided to immigrate because the social and economic situation in Argentina was really awful at the time. We were not afraid of what could happen to us, but we did have a lot of concerns for our children, i.e., my daughter and my stepson. We were worried that they might end up having problems in their growth, and not having a good future in Argentina. We wanted to make our children's life better. That was basically the motive." Even under this kind of circumstance, the family did not come to Canada right away. Instead, GI and his ex-wife did some preparation. Around 1987 and 1988, they made a written inquiry to Immigration Canada asking information related to moving to the country. In reviewing the materials sent back by the government agency in Ottawa, GI learned that his chance to practice medicine in Canada would be almost impossible due to the extremely tough criteria, complicated procedures, and time-consuming process to revalidate his professional qualifications. "At that moment I suddenly realized that I didn't feel ready to come here. After so many years of effort invested in this professional life, it became a big deal if I had been suddenly asked to just leave everything behind and go to a new country even though medicine was not a career of my full heart."

Another couple of years passed, GI gradually felt that he was ready to move on. He felt "it was OK" to leave his professional life behind. Thus, when he came to Canada, he had already known clearly that he was to give up his practice in medicine, the career he had devoted more than 20 years of his life. "Probably I was getting more awareness about who I really was, who I wanted to be. My decision to leave medicine, and head for a new life in Canada was a kind of breaking down of the mask I had been wearing for so long. I came
to the realization that I was faking all my life by pursuing something in which I had little interest, and was feeling unhappy about. I couldn’t hold myself in this persona any longer. Perhaps at the time I was not as conscious about the whole thing as I am right now, but my gut feeling told me that it’s time to leave everything behind. I just made the decision like that." When still in Argentina, GI attended psychotherapy as a client for several years. The issue of leaving for Canada, and making a career change was often a central therapeutic topic. In tackling this issue, his therapist pointed out that there seemed to be a disposition on GI’s part to do a lot of "empty-talking" without action. "I remember clearly that (the therapy encounters) also influenced my decision to leave. Well okay, I said to myself, I’ll take the chance. But no doubt, the main reason behind all these was my chronic state of unhappiness."

The decision was made, and the preparation for immigration began. Studying English was prioritized on the agenda. "English was not unfamiliar to me. I had devoted a whole year, almost full-time, in studying English in 1980. At the time I was planning to study rehabilitation in India although I finally didn’t go there. But anyway, when we decided to come go to Canada, I re-started studying English again for two years on a part time basis." Another preparation was to collect information about Canada, and to get to know the country better. "I remember that I asked questions of anyone who knew anything about Canada or had visited Canada. I asked things like what Canada looked like, what it was like to work in this country, how easy it was to find a job, how general life was in living in this country, how friendly Canadians were in treating others, how one’s ethnic background such as being white or non-white would be possibly perceived and treated by others, so on and
so forth."

**Middle: Initial Adjustment**

GI immigrated to Canada with his family in September, 1990. He thought that he had psychologically prepared himself the best he could. Once he stepped on Canadian soil, he was struck by the big gap between what he had learned and expected and what he was facing. "It was amazing that as human beings how easy it would be for us to absorb the things we wanted to hear and perceive. Our mind is often like a filter: the favourable and good things are filtered in while the unappealing and unpleasant things are filtered out. I am sure I was informed about difficulties ahead before coming to Canada, but they just didn’t take much space in my memory. Of course, the Canadian reality I had imagined and formed back in Argentina did not exist. The reality here struck me very hard, and it was a totally different picture." In retrospect, GI thinks that it might be that most information he got was from people who had lived in Canada in the late 1960s through the early 1980s, when Canada was experiencing a booming economy and prosperity. GI realized that what he was facing was a challenging Canadian economy in the 1990s. The macro-labour market was going down a slippery slope that nation had not seen for decades. New immigrants, struggling for financial survival, became more vulnerable in this economic climate.

The first and foremost difficulty that emerged was the anxiety for financial survival in the new environment. Although having enjoyed social prestige in being a medical doctor in Argentina, the career itself didn’t bring any significant financial reward to GI. Upon leaving for Canada, GI and his family sold most of their possessions. "We came here, and lived for two months with what we had brought. Then, nothing else was left. After two
months we didn’t know what to do. I had thought that it was going to be challenging, but not that challenging.” For GI, his first-year experience of Canada was "horrible". He recalled that the first two months were relatively good. The family lived in the city of Coquitlam with his brother-in-law who had been living in Canada for more than 15 years. "My brother-in-law and his family had a rented house in Coquitlam, so we shared the place with them. He was really nice, and helped us a lot. But something unexpected happened. After a month, the landlord came and said that the house was only for one family, not for two families. Then my family had to move out to another place which was close to where my brother-in-law and his family were living. This was really not something I could have anticipated before coming. That was the starting point of my family’s struggle for financial survival, I would say."

As money was running out, GI was preoccupied with the struggle to support his family. By chance, GI and his ex-wife met a person from El Salvador one day during a bus ride. This person suggested that they go to the Ministry of Social Services asking for help while looking for a job. GI described the experience of applying for welfare from the provincial government as "really going through hell". At first, the application was promptly denied. The reason was that as a Canadian citizen and sponsor, his ex-wife was supposed to carry out the obligation to support GI financially for his immigration to Canada. "After awhile, because she was a Canadian who was entitled to social assistance, she started to receive welfare from the government office, but that was hell! It was very hard, you went there virtually begging again and again. It’s a system that really discourages people. It was tough that they said yes to you only after you had insisted, insisted, and insisted, begging
to them. This was my first experience with the system, and not a pleasant memory for sure." GI got a job working as a rehabilitation aide after six months of living in Canada, and was able to hold the job for five months. He then qualified for unemployment insurance and was busy looking for new employment. In the next two years, he worked as a carpentry helper for his father-in-law, who was a carpenter, building wooden fences. To make ends meet, the experience of desperately hanging onto short-term jobs went on for two and a half years until GI was accepted into the Guidance Diploma Program in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in the summer of 1993.

There was no doubt that GI had always been dissatisfied with his medicine profession before coming to Canada. However, the initial few years of living in the country increased his feeling of unhappiness and disillusionment. The most difficult part from a career sense was that virtually nothing in his previous background such as credentials, qualifications, years of professional experience, and the like, was recognized here. "The biggest culture shock was probably the feeling that all I had achieved in my past life was worthless: it was nothing but garbage. That was the most shocking experience I had ever had at the time. It was debasing because it was like something really was pulling you down in a way that I had experienced very few times in my life. I was feeling absolutely invalidated." Although GI had a few close relatives he generally felt alienated and isolated. He was not successful in building new relationships. The only two people that GI could get psychological support from were his ex-wife and the El Salvador friend whom he had met on the bus.

To integrate himself into the new society, especially the main stream culture of the society, seemed to be challenging for GI. One of the main barriers was the way in which
others perceived his Latin American heritage. He was aware of the fact that some people in the Canadian society did have prejudice toward people from Latin America, and they tended to look down upon Latin Americans as a community and as a culture. "One misperception was that Latin Americans lack exposure to technology. Some individuals here looked at all people from Latin America with stereotyping lenses. In their eyes, all the people from that region were the same no matter that there are 22 countries in that part of the world. For example, in my last job, my supervisor said to me: 'you Latin Americans are so disorganized.' I found this kind of generalized misperception very prejudicial. As a matter of fact, not all Latin Americans are disorganized." Likewise, it was difficult for GI when others treated him with a judgmental attitude simply because he was culturally different from others in this society. He also noticed that individuals from a more developed country, and especially those who could speak fluent English, were much better off in re-establishing their vocational life in Canada. New immigrants, like himself, were quite disadvantaged in the labour market.

Despite his struggles, GI did have some positive experiences. "What I enjoyed the most in Canada was a sense of individual freedom, not necessarily the quality of the freedom. It was something like the way that the houses are built here, especially those in the suburbs. You could see that a house usually has a lot of space around it. I found that this society was like that house: it gave you a lot of space to move around, and you can do a lot in this space depending on who you are and what you want. This just corrected the negative side of a collective culture, in which you have to fit the collective demands of the community no matter who you are. If you don't fit the collective parts of it, then there is
no space for being who you are." While appreciating the positive aspect of such a freedom in stretching one's potential and needs, GI also recognized the negative impact that such an individualistic culture could have on people's life. He thought that sometimes this individuality tended to cause a lack of collective understanding as well as a lack of community sense in approaching issues. "The culture here tended to encourage creativity at a very individual level. My culture was a lot more creative at the collective level."

These initial years of living in Canada were not an easy experience for GI. Distress intensified as he struggled for employment and financial survival, coped with the loss of social status, adjusted to the new lifestyle and culture in the host country, and the like. One way of coping with life was to face the reality and live with it. GI recalls that he "just kept on going" with things he could do at the time. Spending time studying English helped him in the coping process. GI attended English language classes and found some comfort in this experience for he knew that improving his language skill would be vital to his life adjustment and to his career pursuits. In the meantime, counselling also became a helping resource for GI. "I was receiving counselling service through the arrangement of an organization called VAST (Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture). The organization worked with people who had been tortured, and it also worked with new immigrants going through challenging transitions in life. I was referred by the organization to see a counsellor at a reduced service fee rate of $35 per session (the original hourly rate was $100)." The counselling lasted for 9 months, focusing on personal and career adjustment problems. Among several career options, GI was trying to decide whether to learn a trade or to go back to university for re-training. "I remember I was attending a job
search club. I said to myself that maybe I could learn the painting trade through apprenticeship because I like to paint walls and stuff like this. But I started to think deeper and look further when I was struck by what the employment counsellor said. This woman reminded me that one should not throw away all what he/she had gained in his/her previous professional life. That advice really helped me quite a lot. Before that, my feeling was that all I had done in my life was nothing, but a pile of waste." GI began to wonder how he could utilize his previous educational and professional background as a base upon which he could pursue a new career direction.

In his regular counselling sessions, career issues were constantly discussed. His counsellor suggested that GI might consider to go for a Master's degree program in counselling psychology. First, it was in the broad domain of human psychology, an area of interest for GI. Second, the discipline appealed to GI's interest in working with people on an interactive basis. Third, the program was supposed to be easier than directly going into a PhD program in clinical Psychology. "These analyses from (the counselling) sessions certainly helped me to look at the whole thing of rebuilding my career in Canada with a more comprehensive view and a more open mind. I was considering his suggestion seriously." This search for a new career direction was also affected by a conversation GI had with a fellow Argentinean, a medical doctor who was the head of the research unit at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver. During the conversation, GI was advised to consider a new career that would be very different from his previous occupation in Argentina given the fact that he had not enjoyed his medical profession, and had no intention to go back to it again. "He suggested that I should seriously look into the work that I had thought for
myself all my life, that was, things I would really appreciate to do but not to simply meet others' expectations. He said that similar professions in the medicine domain such as nursing should be written off from the option list as I may end up feeling frustrated and resentful. I thought he was totally right. That (conversation) helped me make a resolution not to go back into the medicine-related field again. So, when I was accepted by the guidance diploma program in counselling psychology at UBC in the summer of 1993, I felt a sense of relief. For me, it was something like a confirmation that I was finally able to walk out of the shadow of unhappiness in my previous career, and start a new and fresh path in life."

According to GI, the purpose of going back to university comprised three main aspects. First, to actualize what he wanted to do for himself in his life GI regarded the move as catching the opportunity of being whom he wanted to be professionally, and engaging in a worklife he always desired. Second, it was a deliberate effort to re-train himself in a field of study that he was interested in so that he would be able to re-build a vocational identity in Canada. Third, he attempted to "get some personal recognition" through this effort, namely prove to others that as an Latin American he was capable of pursuing academic training, and based on that, developing a successful life career path in this country. With these goals and motives, GI started his career journey as a counsellor trainee at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training

Going back to university initiated a new phase of transition. The first big hurdle was the language difficulty. GI had not realized how difficult it was going to be until he was involved in the training process. Inadequacy could occur when using English as a second
language in routine communication. Academic training in counselling psychology required higher language skills and it became a major challenge. "It was very difficult to deal with academic and training work because of my language skills. In the beginning, I would say, both my capacity in understanding and writing were not competent at all. I realized that I virtually needed to do everything from the very basic level." The mastery of the English language, thus, became the first priority in GI's learning agenda. He was clearly aware of the fact that without an adequate language capacity, going further in counselling psychology, a language-intensive program and profession, would be virtually impossible. He concentrated on improving his language skills in English while busily absorbing and digesting the training content. "To me it was like going through a parallel learning process. The enhancement of my language ability went hand-in-hand with the constant taking-in of these brand new theoretical models and the practical skills in the counselling field. This meant extra work, extra time, and extra effort. There was no easy way for me take a shortcut. So, I guess what I did was to constantly remind myself to keep motivated and focus on my work. It was extremely difficult in the beginning. You kind of felt like you were in the clouds, not so sure if you were really on the right track. Well, I told myself to stay on course and to do the best I could. Hard work appeared to pay off eventually. After the first two semesters, I felt everything seemed to be running okay." As the language roadblock was gradually taken down, GI was gaining more confidence: he better understood the training content, felt more comfortable with his studies and training, and was able to enjoy the learning content that sounded particularly meaningful to him.

Language, however, was by no means the only barrier he faced. Because of his
previous educational and professional background, GI had been used to a style of factual observation and description in dealing with issues. "I tended to be very economic and dry when I wrote, looking for factual evidence, and communicating with others in a simple and factual manner. Then I learned that in counselling psychology that kind of perspective and method didn’t work. Clients needed more explanations. You, as the counsellor, needed more avenues to approach a clinical problem. Instead of narrowing things down to come up with a simple answer, like what I usually would have done as a medical doctor, here in counselling you needed to open up things, expand things, and find more ways of doing things. For me, this way of thinking was very difficult. My mind had been trained to make a diagnosis from symptoms. But here I had to listen to many things in a person’s life, and make many hypotheses based on what has been said. This approach was totally different from what I had learned before."

While adjusting his mind to this new mode of thinking was relatively easy, GI found it difficult to delineate his understanding and perceptions, especially in a written form. "It was like I could see and understand easily in my mind. But it was not as easy to articulate verbally. It became even more difficult for me to translate my thought into writing." Although English language incompetency did have a strong impact, GI felt that the unfamiliarity with the special characteristics and nature of counselling psychology had also contributed to the challenging experience. GI came to the realization that in order to engage himself in the new discipline, he had to substantially change the way of thinking he had been used to, and foster a new way of thinking and doing things, "a transformation of your mind".
The Canadian higher educational context in general, and the training in counselling psychology in particular, presented an educational format that was "totally different" from GI's previous academic experience in Argentina. "Here the emphasis appeared to be on stimulating your thinking rather than spending time to complete what your teacher told you to do. Most of the work such as reading and writing was intended to open up your mind, and generate your ideas and thoughts on issues." Training curricula in counselling psychology usually took an interactive approach that encouraged trainees' involvement in the learning process. In almost every class, quite a percentage of the workload was devoted to interactive activities such as class participation and presentations. GI felt discouraged by such requirements for he was not accustomed to these forms of learning. "Of course, if I had to present something, I always tried to do my best, but just for the sake of the presentation and for my fellow trainees. That was it, and nothing else. It was not my cup of tea for sure. I was not so good at these kinds of things like speaking in the class. That's why I felt disappointed that almost every class gave a lot of percentage of marks to these things. You see, it was very difficult for me to be proactive in class discussions. I couldn't jump in because my language skill was no good, I mean, not good enough to the point that I could feel free to jump in and talk about what I was thinking." The general culture in Argentina was that teachers were the ones who talked most of the time, and students were basically the listeners. Although students were expected to ask questions concerning issues they were not clear about, and teachers would clarify them to facilitate students' comprehension, interactive participation like that used here in Canadian universities was never an expectation back in Argentina. This was particularly true in the medical school,
classes followed a lecture format and the professor who had the floor was always the expert in the teaching-learning process.

GI tried to make himself more adaptable to the new interactive learning format in his training, but unfortunately, he found that his language skills hindered his wishes to be more active in class activities. "I suppose very often my mind was participating well, but I got stuck when I was translating what was in my mind. My English was not automatic enough and it was not developed in the same way as that of people who are born here."

Meanwhile, culturally-oriented rules of communication also appeared to have had an impact on GI's perception and comfort to speak out in a classroom setting. As a virtue of humility and respect, GI has grown up in a cultural environment which emphasized students' reverence to their teachers. "For me, I would be waiting for the professor or supervisor to ask me 'what do you think about this' before I could say anything. Otherwise, I couldn't jump in to the conversation or discussion because blunt interruption in the middle of others' talking was really not appreciated in my culture. It would be looked down upon by others. Obviously, that kind of unwritten code of communication between the professor and the students (in my culture) was totally different from the one in this country." Similarly, GI felt extremely reluctant to interrupt when his fellow trainees were talking. He felt that it was virtuous to show politeness and let others finish what they had to say first even if he wanted to express his viewpoint on an issue. He later found that he would end up having no chance to say anything as there was always someone else who would insert his or her opinion in the middle of the discussion. "I might have been perceived by others as pretty dumb since I was not actively contributing my thoughts into the discussion. But the truth was that there
exists a huge (culture) gap in terms of interpersonal communication in this kind of classroom setting. It was amazing to see how self-focused individuals were when they jumped into the conversation and went on and on with their opinions. It would have been a totally different picture if you were in Argentina. Once people were aware that you were new and didn’t speak their language very well, it is likely that they would invite you to join their conversation, approaching you and asking you things. But in this culture, if you don’t approach people, they would not ask you anything. So, if you lost your chance to speak out what you thought, that was your problem. You were supposed to grab every opportunity to express yourself in class discussions. You compete in everything with others, even for the time to speak in the class."

GI found that he was more at ease with a small group than with a big group. "I learned a lot more in a small group because I felt less anxious. I was able to speak more freely and didn’t have a lot of anxiety on my expressions. But I felt intimidated to do the same in a big group. The concern of my language ability even worsened this sense of intimidation."

His best experience as a counsellor trainee was clinical training. "Practicing counselling under the direct supervision was rewarding. This made me feel that the learning I was involved in was really worthwhile. Very often, what I got from my course work was basically theoretical knowledge. The end result was only illustrated on the papers I wrote for the course. I am not saying that this kind of 'learning-on-the-paper' was not necessary, but it tended to be abstract for me to put my hands on it. The clinical training was different. It allowed me to connect the paper knowledge with the real life situations, and to see how
theories would work or not work in practice. I was able to learn new things and improve my skills through hands-on real experiences."

A critical event that occurred in the middle of his new career pursuit in becoming a professional counsellor, was his successful transfer from the Guidance Diploma program to the Master's program in counselling psychology. After having completed 90% of the required course work in guidance diploma studies, GI was admitted into the Master's program in counselling psychology at UBC in the fall of 1995. "On becoming a graduate trainee, I felt the pressure was higher as expectations on a graduate student would be higher. On the other hand, I felt very validated." As the competition for admission was always very high, it was not unusual for individuals to apply several times before they finally would be accepted into the program. Many people never did get admitted. GI was successful with his first application to the program. The most difficult experience for GI was an incident in a course he took. He went to talk with the instructor at the end of the semester concerning a paper he wrote for the course. "I told the professor that I knew my writing skill was not excellent and I was trying to do my best to improve it. I also accepted the suggestion that I should have someone doing proof reading for me. Then I said something like 'but anyway, I am a lot more concerned about my counselling skills than my writing skills'. The reply from the instructor was that other people might regard me as not very intelligent if I didn't have good writing skills. I understood that the original intention of that instructor was really trying to help me improve my writing. But the way it was put out was difficult for me to swallow. For me, it was a put down, you know, it was something like you were told that you were not very intelligent since you didn't demonstrate writing skills. As a result, you
were really not worth being considered a good student or a good counsellor. That was
probably the most striking experience that I had in my training: it was extremely
discouraging!"

The failure of clear communication between the instructor/supervisor and the trainee
at times led to some misunderstandings. Perhaps this type of miscommunication occurred
more easily because of the complication of cross-cultural communication, where the
definitions and meanings of a simple expression can be interpreted differently. GI recalls
such an experience in his basic counselling skill training course during his guidance diploma
studies. "I was explaining my counselling strategies to my supervisor. What I was trying
to say was that it would be helpful to utilize exercises. But I used the term 'games' to
describe such exercises. Unfortunately, the term 'game' was taken totally wrongly by the
instructor. Obviously, he perceived that I was talking about playing some kind of mind
games with my clients. He then started lecturing me on and on. He said: 'well, if you were
my counsellor and I am not improving after playing these games, I just sue you because of
that...' Again, I felt like shit. I said to myself: 'Oh my God, see what I have done: I did
something totally wrong here.'" Despite some bitterness, GI accepted the instructor's
feedback. In a later counselling exercise session, GI had the opportunity to talk with his
student counsellor about how he had been hurt by this experience. By talking about and
reflecting on what had happened, he realized that the whole incident was not such a big deal
but simply the definition and understanding of a word. While having wished that he himself
could have used the right word and proper term in the first place, he felt strongly that a bit
more sensitivity on the instructor's part could have prevented the negative experience from
happening. "For example, he could have simply checked what I meant by 'games'. Things would have been totally different. However, his tone and posture were so overpowering that I felt like a small piece of shit in front of a group."

GI felt that the tone of the feedback as well as the way that the feedback was given to him significantly affected his reaction to the feedback. He recalls that in another class he was asking the instructor whether it would be possible for him to work on an assignment in a different way. The instructor responded with a "no" for she expected to see a more clearly structured and defined assignment. "She went on explaining to me why this was needed, and why there was space for negotiation in some part while no space for negotiation in other places. When everything was clarified, I felt fine with the answer I got, and I didn't resent it at all. I thought she was right and quite reasonable in giving these explanations, and I had no problem accepting them even though I had wished I could have got more room to do what I wanted to do. Experience like this one differed substantially from the other two negative incidents I have just mentioned." GI acknowledged the fact that there were also good experiences during his encounters with different professors, many of whom appeared to be very approachable and supportive. He was able to obtain assistance and advice with respect to his academic training whenever he needed help. "Support from instructors and supervisors was very important. I learned better in a facilitative atmosphere where I felt quite positive, relaxed, and motivated to concentrate on my work. Otherwise, I felt distracted and distressed. Whenever the latter happened, my self-esteem and self-confidence suffered, and the negative feelings hindered my progress in training."

He particularly appreciated the useful clinical learning he was able to gain following
concrete instructions and supervision provided by some clinically-oriented training experiences such as the graduate level counselling clinic. "The most empowering experience for me was the learning in the clinic. Working with clients generated a very rewarding feeling as I knew I was helping them. In the meantime, the feedback I received from my supervisors was also empowering: not only did I see how I had learned new skills and progressed as a professional helper, but also I could feel how I had grown internally as a person in my own life." Constructive feedback in clinical supervision and clear instruction, according to GI, was essential in nourishing this sense of positivity and reward. It served to enhance development, i.e., skill advancement and personal growth in his learning and training experience. "These two aspects were both extremely important to my life career as my goal was really to be a good counsellor for others while continuing the growth and personal well-being of myself." Clinical training provided the real impetus for gaining and refining counselling experiences. GI regarded this area as one in which he could measure his competency as a counsellor. "I worked hard to increase my competency as a counsellor trainee, and I always wanted to become a competent counsellor. But honestly, I didn't care much about what kind of marks I would get; I cared about my real counselling skills much more than the grades I got from individual courses. The only thing I am very concerned about is whether I have the real competence in working effectively with my clients, and I would put a lot of effort working on that." Another main reason that GI enjoyed the clinic was the open and collegial relationship he had with his fellow trainees. "It was a very cooperative and positive kind of environment. You felt like having a trustful and intimate tie with your fellow students; you could openly share what you thought with your colleagues
because the relationship was already there. For me, this kind of relationship was very important as it made me feel at ease to learn; my anxiety of speaking in front of the class also was reduced quite a bit." While the smaller size of the clinic class might have contributed to the good feelings, GI thought that the collaborative and positive attitude of the group was likely the key factor for creating such a favourable training context.

Another crucial factor that could either facilitate or hinder his training was events in his personal life, especially those related to his family. In coping with life career challenges after coming to Canada, including those he was experiencing in counsellor training, GI did receive a lot of support from his wife. However, such family support vanished when his marriage ended. He and his ex-wife then started to share the joint-custody of their 9-year-old daughter. This circumstance interfered with his studies, and affected his energy and concentration. As a result, GI had to ask for a one year leave of absence.

In reviewing his experience as a counsellor trainee, GI felt that his biggest gain was the increase of self-awareness and self-understanding. "Throughout the whole training, I have become more conscious about my own issues such as beliefs, values, strengths, weaknesses, main sources of confidence, and things like these. Learning and training experiences in some courses, like the graduate clinic course, tended to be particularly helpful to my personal growth. My self-concept advanced to a higher level; my sense of confidence was strengthened. I really grew a lot in interpersonal relationships and communication. I feel a lot more confident when I deal with people individually, or when I have to deal with small groups and talk in front of people, and work on my writings." GI
used the metaphor of drawing a picture of a range of mountains to depict how he felt about his experience of being a counsellor trainee. In this image there were many valleys and some peaks. Although the valleys outnumbered the peaks in his drawing, these peaks represented significant gains he achieved through the whole learning process. It was these crucial "peak" experiences that really helped him improve as a counsellor and as a person. "Achievement in professional knowledge and skills has been quite substantial, but there is more than that. What I appreciate most has been an internal sense of personal growth and accomplishment. This sense of accomplishment from within myself is about how I have struggled with challenges and changes along the way, and reached the present point in my life career path. I don't know if I can control my own destiny as this kind of ideology sounds a little bit too 'North American' for me. But I would say that I found my destiny." What has happened thus far appears to be some sort of illuminating and transcendent experience for GI; it has been his personal self-exploration journey. "I am still discovering who I am, and I am on my way to be who I really am."

GI is continuing his training, and he expects to complete his Master's degree in counselling psychology in the near future. With respect to the connection between his present training and his prospective career, GI felt that he would benefit from the practical part much more than the theoretical part of this learning and training experience. "I believe the experience has practically prepared me well for working with people, and this is the career direction I aspire to go for." While keeping his career options wide open, that is, to work either in institutional and organizational settings or in private practice, GI was definitely interested in cross-cultural counselling. He did not see himself going for a Ph.D
degree study in counselling psychology. However, he said that it may be possible for him to pursue a doctoral degree in another discipline such as Jungian psychology in the future. If so, the sole purpose for such a pursuit "would not be for an occupation, for earning more money, or for meeting the expectation of other people; rather, this would be entirely for my personal enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment in life."

The Summary of BH's Story

Demographics

Country of Origin: Kenya
Age: 40
Prior Education: B.Ed (1981)
Prior Career: Teacher and Educational Administrator for 15 years
Family Status: Married with 3 children
Years of Living in Canada: 2 years as an international student
Years of Counsellor Training: 2 years (just completed M.Ed.)
Funding Support: Commonwealth Scholarship

At the time of this interview, BH had just successfully completed her Master's degree in counselling psychology, and had been accepted into the PhD program in counselling at the University of Toronto. She was going back to her home country very soon. She would re-unite with her family in Kenya, and then decide what she would do next.

Beginning: Before Coming to Canada

BH worked as a high school teacher for 8 years after she had obtained her B.Ed degree from the University of Nairobi in Kenya in 1981. "I think I did an excellent job in my profession. So in 1989 I was promoted to work as an administrator for the ministry of
education of the Kenya government. My division’s task was to coordinate academic-related affairs at the high school level. I was in charge of high schools in the cities."

BH described herself as a "people-oriented" person. She enjoys working with people, especially meeting and working with people from different cultures. She won the respect and trust from her colleagues and students because of her people-oriented style and skill in interpersonal communications.

BH’s interest in counselling started when she was still a high school teacher, and it continued to grow through her years working in the ministry of education. She noticed that she seemed to possess a natural talent to work with people. "Many students would like to come to me with their problems. My teacher colleagues did too. I was the head of the department (in school) at the time. Usually people felt reluctant to be too close to the head. But I was regarded as very approachable by my colleagues, and they seemed like to discuss various issues with me." This people-oriented personal style continued to contribute positively in her work at the ministry of education.

The idea of school counselling was brought up in Kenya in the beginning of 1970's but it has never been actualized in the school system. "Counselling was really not a pronounced priority in my country. But the longer I worked in my area, the more importance I saw concerning counselling, and the more interest I grew toward the counselling profession."

While having experienced success and satisfaction in her vocational life in the field of education, BH always kept the aspiration of pursuing graduate studies. "I actually had planned to go to graduate school in 1982 when I finished my BA degree. I didn’t do that
because I got married and started a young family at the time. But going back to school was always my aim."

Pursuing the goal of graduate studies was not a one-shot trial but a tenacious endeavour. BH tried three times, in 1988, 1991, and 1995, respectively. She was unsuccessful the first time. At her second trial in 1991, she was short-listed, and interviewed. BH re-applied to the same program in 1995, and was successful in being accepted by the Canadian government into that year’s Commonwealth Scholarship program.

"I made the choice to study at UBC (The University of British Columbia) entirely by myself. I did consult with a professor at the University of Alberta who taught me psychology in my undergraduate study back in Kenya. But my intension was just to sort of check with him since I had already decided that my first choice would be to go to study at UBC." BH obtained more information when her preference of choice was submitted to the Commonwealth Scholarship selection committee in Kenya. "One of the committee members was a former Kenyan ambassador to Ottawa. He told me that climate in BC was good, and I would likely enjoy it. But I was also told that there were very few Africans in BC, and hopefully I would feel comfortable to live in such an environment."

"It was a tough decision to make. I am married with three teenager children. The scholarship did not include the sponsorship for my family, which I thought was the hardest part. If I could have come with my family, then I could have taken care of them... But I talked to my husband and my children. All of them were extremely supportive."

Middle: Initial Adjustment

BH came to UBC in August of 1996. "I came here directly from Kenya. I had never
been to Canada before, and it was my first to be here. I was received by a host family at
the Vancouver airport, which was arranged by the International House of UBC to assist
international students." She was overwhelmed by a sense of uncertainty. She "even didn't
have any idea of how to register a course, and where to start." Fortunately, her academic
supervisor "was very, very encouraging" in providing her with support and assistance.

"I stayed in the host family's home for 3 days. Then they assisted me to find a one-
month temporary accommodation on campus. I was talking to the people in the Student
Housing Office at UBC, and trying to find a more permanent place for myself. There was
a long queue on the waiting list. But people in the Student Housing office were very kind.
They considered the special circumstance I was in at the time as an international student,
and they decided to give me priority among many students who were applying for campus
housing."

Nonetheless, transition to new life was not easy. "I guess for the first few weeks I
was thinking about going back home, and I was talking to my husband about that over the
phone. I had heard that people in the Western culture were more individualistic. It was not
that they were not welcoming me, but I just did not know how to approach them. I looked
around, I was virtually the only student from Africa that I could see on campus..."

Using English language became a problem. "Because our system (in Kenya) was
more British, I think I was more used to the British style, even the type of English I spoke.
Nowadays, I understand the English people speak here. But when I first came, I didn't
understand what people meant when they spoke to me." BH shared the student residence
with 4 other students. "Each of them just basically minded their own life. They had rare
chances even to sit down at the same table. So I said to myself: 'well, this is very
different!'... but you know, I came to appreciate many such differences later when I had
stayed here a bit longer."

Financial concern for her family was critical. BH’s contribution to the regular family
income was missing due to her study-leave in Canada. To make things worse, her husband
was in the process of vocational change. "I managed to save a little bit here and there when
I needed to buy things, and send the small amount of savings to my children back home."

Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training

BH totally immersed herself in her studies. She did not feel any cultural prejudice
in her academic training. "As I was the only black African in the class, someone might be
in doubt about my capacity to say much about counselling issues. But this did not stop me
participating fully in classes...I got chances to interact with these colleagues in the classes
we were taking, and we had frequent discussions and chats on assignments and other things
after the class. We got along very well. I even made some close friends among them.
Actually these new friends have been a very strong support for me ever since."

BH kept a sense of humour as she was going through this learning process. "I often
made fun of situations. Like when I was coming in today for the interview. I was a little
bit late. So I said: 'Oh, I followed African time.'...I just made people (here) understand
where I come from, so they would accept me that way."

Coming from a non-psychology background in her undergraduate degree studies, BH
was required to take some additional pre-requisite courses to upgrade her knowledge in the
area. This made her workload heavier than some of her fellow students. While many course
subjects were interesting, BH felt she had little time to digest their essence and richness. "The intensity of the workload just made you barely have time to think more about what you are learning. You just kept going to the extent that you just did the work even you did not understand it well. Now, when I am sitting here and looking back at these training experiences, I feel I understand (them) much better. I wish I had such an awareness when I had been in these experiences."

BH particularly enjoyed sharing her viewpoints with fellow trainees who were also from other cultures. "Every time we did a course together, we would say: 'oh, this could be perceived by my culture in this way...'. So we kept comparing, discussing, and exploring the issues emerging from the course subjects. That was really thought-provoking, and I found it very helpful to my study and training."

The support that was missing from the picture, was the direct support from her immediate family. "That was the support I needed most. Although the support from professors and fellow students was important, but it differed from the kind of support you could get from your family. Because the (counsellor) training program was so involving, you really needed to have a family to go to, to talk to, and to relax..."

Adjusting to the training system took time and effort. "When I started my counsellor training here, I realized that the teaching and studying model was quite different from my undergraduate experiences back in Kenya. After the class or clinical training, I was basically on my own to digest what I had been taught. It was very difficult that way in the beginning, and (it) took me quite a while to adjust to that."

Because of her non-psychology background in her undergraduate study, BH found
it difficult to engage in some aspects of her training. "It's like a change of your mind, or equip your mind with very different thinking that you had seldom encountered in your life before. For example, the immediate difficulty I experienced was to learn all these counselling theories that were brand new to me. To make things worse, these theories were very different from the way of thinking that I was brought up and educated in my culture."

It was also difficult for BH to perceive and empathize a client’s feeling when the student client was talking about having different opinions from those of her/his parents, and therefore, she/he was planning to move out of home. "From the perspective of my cultural value, I could have said to that client: 'well, it is not only about you, but you also need to consider how your parents may feel about what you do.' Of course, I didn’t do that, but followed the course of counselling focusing on 'the-self' of the client."

"I have also come to the realization that the (counselling) models and methods I have learned here may not be all relevant in other cultural contexts. I should be very careful if I would use them to my future clients in Kenya once I go back there... I had wished that all the professors and staff in the program would have been more skilful in adopting a multicultural approach in their teaching and/or supervision. Maybe my expectation was a bit too high, but I wished I had been given more help on things like learning strategies, and information about courses and training in the initial training stage." Another hinderance seemed to be the heavy weight of the course load that was required to complete the Masters degree. BH felt that she rarely had enough time to reflect on the course subjects and assignments before they were finished.

"The part of the program I enjoyed most was actually the clinical training aspects
such as basic counselling skill course, clinic, and the practicum." These skill-oriented courses provided BH with good opportunities to connect the theoretical and practical components, and to gain a more concrete sense of what she was supposed to learn. "I also enjoyed class participation such as interactive class exercises, discussions, and formal presentation assignments."

BH felt that her 2-year experience as a counsellor trainee had added valuable learning to her life career development. This was reflected by the professional competency she had gained through the training. "I had not been aware of that until the last several months of my practicum. I could see myself using various skills and intervention techniques in counselling clients with different issues: family issues, personal issues, academic issues, adjustment issues, just to mention a few. Skills were incorporated into the helping process in a natural way, and it was amazing to see what I had learned were really working well with my clients. I felt very good about my training when I saw what I was doing (in the practicum). It reminded me how much I had gained from my training program."

An even more rewarding sense that emerged from this training experience, was a feeling of personal growth. "While achieving good grades and gaining professional skills were important, what I have gained (from this experience) as a person was also important… I guess I have developed a better understanding of people and their lives through the training. Definitely it (the training) has helped to improve my communication skills with other people. I will benefit from my counsellor’s perspective and skills in my future work regardless whether I would be working as a counsellor or not." Further, the training opened the door for several other career options.
The increase of self-awareness was an obvious gain which intertwined with all aspects of self-growth. "It goes with different dimensions. I have come to a much better understanding about myself including what I want for my life, and how it may be interrelated with my family. No doubt, I had a better chance to reflect on my career options. I was motivated to learn more in this field, and that was why I had applied and been accepted into the PhD program." BH saw the need to learn not only counselling knowledge and skills from Western culture, but also things about her own culture. She was hoping to integrate the two together so that the former would make sense in the latter context. This was the initial intent that fuelled her desire to go further in the field. All these gains apparently were greater than the predicaments and unpleasant times she had to endure.

The Summary of JV's Story

Demographics

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<td>Self-supported</td>
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At the time of this interview, JV was 47 years of age. He had obtained his Master's degree in counselling psychology 1997, and was a counsellor in private practice.
Beginning: Before Coming to Canada

Grown up in an upper middle class Catholic family in Mexico City, Mexico, he was the fifth of a seven-child family. "I got my B.B.A. (Bachelor in Business Administration) degree from the National University of Mexico in 1973."

JV started working when he was only 18 years old. "A full-time student, I worked full time for Ford Motor Company in Mexico city for five years, and at age 23, I was already the Industrial Relations Manager for the Company." He then worked as a human resources officer for a chemical company. "At age 26, I was the head of the Human Resources Department for both America Express travel and card sections in Mexico."

"I had many interests, among which two had stood out for me as professional directions before I got into university: psychology and business. I wanted to study psychology, but for various reasons, I didn’t pursue it as my career." Human resource management seemed to combine some psychological features into the business practice, and JV enjoyed this aspect.

Being ambitious, JV aimed at climbing higher on the corporate ladder. "I wanted to go to the very top of an organization. I knew that through human resources I couldn’t do it because you get to the top either through marketing or through finance." Thus, JV accepted an offer from a very good friend, and became a partner in a financial consulting firm. JV soon found that he learned a lot from his new profession and loved it. JV and his friend later formed their own financial company in 1984 and JV became the CEO of that organization. "Our business was successful in the Mexican market and the US market."

After turning 40, JV started to wonder about his future and what he wanted to
accomplish next in his life. "The company was doing very well. I knew I was in a very good position professionally; I was making a lot of money; I was very happy; I had a lot of power and, I was working very well with my friends and partners. But I realized that I didn't like the self-image in 15 or 20 years if I continued with my present path. What I saw was me at 60 years of age. I would be very rich, very powerful, and famous, but above all these, pretty empty. Why? Because I would not accomplish some of the things that I had desired for my life."

This feeling of emptiness, according to JV, probably had arisen from the life career experiences he had been going through for a long time. "A father of four children at the time (and the 5th child was going to be born soon), I worked 12 hours everyday, and didn't have much time to spend with my children. I was very busy working, making money and trying to keep everything under control. I couldn't help but start to wonder whether this would be the only life style I desired. My answer to it was a 'no'." JV desired some change for his life and career, but it was not an easy decision to make. "It was very difficult to leave what I had earned: my friends, my partners, my organization, all the prestige and power, financial gains, etc. So it took me around a year to really make the decision." His wife supported his decision.

"When I left my company, I didn't know where I wanted to go. What I actually wanted to do was to take a break because I had been working non-stop for 22 years, since I was only 18 years old. My wife and I wanted to go somewhere for one or two years, and give the children experience to learn another language. In the meantime, I might keep trying to figure out what I want to do next. So, that was the whole idea, and we chose to come to
JV came to Canada three times beforehand for preparation. "I immigrated to Canada as a business man. That was why I set up a business consulting office in Vancouver. Of course, I also made other necessary arrangements for my family...the whole family including the nanny and chauffeur came to Vancouver in July of 1991. Although with landed immigrant status, we initially planned to stay no more than 3 years. But later, the family liked it here very much so we decided to stay."

**Middle: Initial Adjustment**

JV’s life in Canada was connected with his past work experience. "For me it was a not an abrupt, but rather, very gradual disengagement from I used to do for living. I continued my expertise in financial consulting in Vancouver, but at a slower pace. This way of life lasted for about one year. I used this period of time to relax; to think over what I would like to pursue next...I just couldn’t cut off my previous life over night."

Life in Vancouver was exciting. "I was fascinated. I loved virtually everything here: the people, the place, the environment, and the culture. I was totally enjoying the clean and peaceful style of city life here." Needless to say, there were always unavoidable difficulties for newcomers. Not speaking fluent English was a barrier for JV. "Also, I didn’t know my way around very well. I wasn’t connected with many people. But all those things were common when you were new in a place. They really didn’t prevent me from doing anything I wanted to do. It was not that I had to come here, but I chose to. I think that made a big difference."

A key factor that facilitated the relaxed and enjoyable mood, and made the life
transition easier was JV's affluent financial background. "This made a world of difference, it really did. I didn't have any pressure in that regard. I was here to enjoy, to figure out what I wanted to do next, but not to worry about how my family or myself would survive." As a result, other common difficulties for newcomers became too trivial to stir negative feelings for JV. "Everything worked out wonderfully, and I didn't have any problems, period."

Reading became a part of JV's leisure time. "I had always been interested in reading things related to psychology, I loved it so much. I mean, it wasn't like a textbook on psychology. It was more about things related to human psychology in general, such as spirituality and human development." This revisit of his interest in reading led to the rediscovery of his passion for psychology. "I came to the realization that my interest in psychology had never faded away, and that was what I wanted to pursue for my vocation."

JV started to examine the possibility of going to the University of British Columbia (UBC) studying Psychology. "I soon realized that the biological feature of the topic was really not the thing I could connect to. I guess I was looking for something more connected with human interaction and spirituality. But at the time, I didn't know that counselling psychology existed at all. The receptionist in counselling psychology was just wonderful in providing me with all the information I needed. After reading the program brochure, I said to myself, yes, yes, this can connect to what I wanted and I really liked it."

A critical experience that perhaps indirectly added to JV's interest in becoming a helping professional was the volunteer work he was heavily involved with in 1992. "It was a wonderful and lovely experience. I would go to Langley every week for one full day,
working as a horse-riding instructor and helping children and adults with physical or mental
disability. "For JV, it was truly rewarding seeing his efforts contributed to the well being
of others through such "riding therapies".

Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training

To fulfil the prerequisite course requirement for the Master’s degree program, JV
first enrolled in the guidance diploma program in counselling psychology at UBC in the
spring of 1993. "I took a positive perspective in looking at this ‘qualifying’ process. I would
use this opportunity to see how it was to go back to school after almost 20 years, and also
to see if I really liked that program or not." One year later, in May of 1994, JV
successfully completed the diploma program. Almost at the same time, he was admitted to
the Master’s program.

However, going through this entire learning and training experience was by no
means an easy journey, especially in the beginning. "I was used to another environment.
I was used to working in the organization, and going to my office every day. But now, I
had a teacher to tell me things, to leave me homework… it was a little bit challenging
because I was used to be the boss. At times, I felt out of place, but at times I felt that I was
right in my place. It was a mixed experience in that sense."

English language deficiency became a roadblock. While extra effort was needed in
listening comprehension and speaking, writing was the most difficult part that JV had to
struggle with. "So I had to work not twice, but probably five times as much as other
students did in school work, particularly I found myself spending long hours in written
assignments…To add to that, I was an achiever; I always aimed at a higher goal. I told
myself: 'you got to work hard and make it.' The only thing I could do was to work, work, and work, just spending a lot of time and effort on it."

"I actually did not compare my student experience in Canada to my previous student life in Mexico because they were simply not comparable to each other. First, counsellor profession was a different career from my previous work life. Second, it was more than 20 years after my previous student life. Third, it was a different place now. So, I wasn't expecting anything similar, and it wasn't a shock. My prior student experience 20 years in Mexico was so far away and behind that it could never be brought to the same context, not even as a comparison for what I was experiencing now." Rather than experiencing a culture shock, JV felt that his "shock" was more associated with the fact that he had not been in school for 20 years, and the identity change to the role of student.

One key factor that positively contributed to this coping process was that the transition was voluntary. "I did it because I wanted to. I knew that I was doing something I loved to do for a long time. As I was convinced about and committed to that, I was feeling much better when I coped with everything along the way. This really helped to alleviate the pain of the shock." Personality may be another positive factor. "There was always a part of me that was very simple and humble regardless of my background and previous social status. It seemed very natural for me to use or connect with that part of myself when being a counsellor trainee. I was not the CEO at UBC. I was just myself and I loved being myself. This part of my personal resources seemed to function naturally, and it was very helpful to my coping." JV got along well with colleagues in the training program. He found it fairly easy to connect with both professors and peer trainees, and he perceived the overall
training environment as "very favourable". "To a certain degree, the environment might be more important than the content of the training program itself. I just loved being there with the people, the instructors, and fellow students as well." He did not feel that he was experiencing any kind of biases or prejudice against him. "People might see me as different because I was from another culture, I had an accent when I spoke English, and I would make different jokes that they were not familiar with. But I never felt that things like these set up any barriers between other people and myself." Cultural differences, according to JV, actually did not prevent him from being integrated with his colleagues in the training environment.

"My wife was supportive in a general sense. For example, she would spend more time with the kids, and take care of other family responsibilities if I was busy with my study. This helped a great deal. So I had more time to concentrate on my training, and did not have to worry too much about family affairs." JV felt that he also benefited from his financial circumstance. "I was not even part-time working during my study. So I was truly a full-time student only: focusing my energy and time totally on my school work and my family life. Wasn't that lovely? Very often I actually wished that the class time could have been prolonged. When classes were over, probably most of my student colleagues were happy as they might have to rush to their work or for other things like that. But I was not in the same mood. For me, the finish of a class was like quite a loss."

Counselling a real client in the clinical training course brought a lot of excitement. However, having one's performance watched by others could cause anxiety feelings. "Initially, I was worried about the possibility of being judged by other people. But after a
while, I could see the overall positive atmosphere of the training environment, and I got used to that. So, I felt at home doing counselling with a real client. A metaphor to describe how I felt at the time would be a saying in Spanish: 'like a fish in the water'."

JV immersed himself totally into the process. He would usually do a lot more than what it required. "I always had a strong sense of accomplishment so it was important (for me) to get a good mark. But I was more fascinated by the process I was going through: the enjoyment of learning and doing--I just loved it. I am not saying that there were no challenges. Yes, there were times I got stuck, and got frustrated with the topics I had to work on. But most of the time, I loved it." For JV, it was more like a parallel process: the gaining of the professional knowledge and skills went hand in hand with the increase in self-awareness.

Coping with obstacles seemed very natural for JV, and he "could live with them very easily with no problem". Nonetheless, he was not impressed by a couple of incidents. On one occasion, JV was shocked to observe that an instructor showed an obvious lack of interest in teaching. "How could you do a good job if you don’t enjoy what you are doing? It was disappointing and unethical at a certain point. So I disliked that." Another incident happened in a statistics and measurement class taught by a visiting professor. "I usually participated in class discussions a lot. It was really not that I wanted to show myself in front of others, but because I was truly interested in many new topics I was encountering. I did the same in that particular class. I actually disagreed with something that the professor said and presented another alternative. Perhaps he didn’t like my proposal, and he threw back to me a very scornful response which caught me by a total surprise. Although I did not react
to that, I was very hurt by the sarcastic comment. At the time, I hated it, and I hated him. He should have been respectful to others' viewpoints, and been open enough to take the challenge of a student. It could have been a positive experience if I had been seen as a colleague who was also able to contribute to the learning process although I was a student in that situation."

Isolated incidents like these had little impact on his overall positive feeling about the training experience. "Most of the time during my training, I was truly enjoying my interaction with professors and clinical supervisors. They were always available, respectful, helpful, and most of all, supportive whenever I needed guidance and assistance. They were understanding and considerate in providing constructive feedback and advice in training and research processes." As a result, despite a few isolated unpleasant events, JV affirmed that his interpersonal relationship with professors and fellow trainees was "a wonderful experience".

A typical way for coping with difficult situations and stress was to confront them rather than avoid them. "I attempted to master and conquer the problem. Thus, I had some control over it rather than the problem having control over me." When he was lacking skills and knowledge JV would spend more time and effort in order to learn, to practice, and to do much better. "I don't think this was a cultural thing. It can just be a personality characteristic, which probably had to do with how I was raised, or something of parental influence from my early years. For me, I can't stand feeling vulnerable. Facing a problem and working on it helped me to maintain a sense of control. Another way to cope with the stress was to get mad. I just got mad and didn't deal with it. Well, for sure, it was merely
a coping method for myself, but not a helping strategy when I was in the role of a counsellor. Another way to cope with difficult situations was to talk with people, for example, to share with my colleagues."

"I think I came out (of the training) with a good general knowledge of the field, but very little expertise in a practical sense. I feel I lack more concrete experience in doing counselling. My training in that aspect was very general, at times I would say, a little bit superficial. I mean, it was quite academic as opposed to front line practice." JV had loved this academically-oriented characteristic of the program. However, after leaving the program, he now feels that counsellor trainees would be better off by coming out of the program with more refined specialties and broadened expertise in real counselling practice.

After four years of tenacious effort, JV obtained his Master's degree in the spring of 1997, and has been in private practice since then. "I am in a difference phase now. I mean, this is more like the face of application. But the new career actually started five years ago when I became a counsellor trainee...It's like an ongoing story. A chapter of the story ended when I left Mexico and started a new life in Canada. This last five years have been another chapter, and it ended with the completion of my Master's degree. Now, a new one has just started. I don't consider this as the end of the story. I don't know how the story line is going to evolve." This feeling of uncertainty may reflect JV's sense of ambivalence on what he went through for the last few years.

On one hand, being a counsellor trainee had been a rewarding experience for JV, and he did enjoy it a lot. No doubt, it prepared him well for his present new career. "Without the training in counselling psychology, I would not be as competent as I am at my
present work...In many ways they (knowledge and skills) are already integrated into my personal style, and they are my way of being in the world. Moreover, it was a very personally transformative experience. Through the journey of self-exploration, I became more aware who I was as a person. It was a process of understanding, discovering, and changing."

On the other hand, there were regrets or even senses of disillusionment and loss at times. "I have changed a lot and I believe that this change had bettered me. But the disadvantage or the negative part of it is that the world around me hasn’t changed much in the same way. Thus, some difficult things occurred. For example, there has been an estrangement in relationships."

To concur with his occasional feeling of financial loss due to his career change, JV was also concerned about his career prospects in the counselling field given the challenging job market reality.

The Summary of KM’s Story

Demographics

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KM had just finished his first year study in the Guidance Diploma program in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC) when this interview began. Married with two children, a five-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son, KM was 38 years old. He was born and raised in Hong Kong.

Beginning: Before Coming to Canada

KM graduated from Poly Technic Institute of Hong Kong in 1982, majoring in industrial and production engineering. "The school was like BCIT (British Columbia Institute of Technology) we have here in Greater Vancouver area. With the diploma from that institute and a 2-year supervised full-time work experience, I became a licensed engineer in the British system. So, I went through that kind of professional path instead of the first degree." He worked in a variety of positions in the field of electronic production and manufacturing for 9 years. KM undertook a full-time graduate program for 2 years while continuing his full-time engineer career with the company. He received his Master's degree in industrial engineering from the University of Hong Kong in 1991.

Life in general, and career in particular, gave KM a sense of satisfaction and pride. "I was very successful, and I was very lucky as well. I climbed the ladder fast. I always seemed to get the opportunity doing something I wanted to do." In 1991, KM switched his career to work as a training officer for the Vocational Training Council of Hong Kong, a government organization in the public sector. His main responsibility was to design and provide re-training programs for engineers in upgrading their professional knowledge. With his Master's credential, KM enjoyed higher prestige as well as financial benefit in this new occupation. "I really believe in hard working, and I would get myself very concentrated on
In the early 1990s, KM and his wife were thinking about immigrating to Canada. "Before making a final decision to come here, we did all kinds of preparation that we could think of. We did a lot of thinking, and talked to our friends to sort our reason for immigration. We also tried hard to collect informed about situations in Canada. We imagined both the best and worst case scenarios regarding employment, living conditions, and other things in Canada."

The main catalyst for immigration was personal inspiration for a new change in life. "We were thinking about getting a chance to learn more about the outside world. My wife also wanted to take some time off so she would have an opportunity for a period of full time studies." The desire for change was equally strong from KM's side. After completing his four-year contract with the government agency, KM was offered a permanent position in that same portfolio by the organization. "I tried to anticipate what would be if I continued to work there. I realized that I was not the kind of guy who could like the bureaucratic working environment there. The nature of the work appeared quite static, and lacked creativity. I thought that perhaps I could pursue a PhD in engineering in Canada before thinking of other career opportunities. Further, both my wife and I wanted to have some time off after working and studying non-stop for so long. We had some fantasy to enjoy some family time with the kids before they go to elementary school." The money they got from the selling of their house in Hong Kong was sufficient for them to sustain themselves for a couple of years. "It would be better if we can find employment very soon. But if not, we could even be full-time parents for awhile."
Middle: Initial Adjustment

In August of 1995, KM and his family immigrated to Vancouver, British Columbia. They soon realized that dealing with real adjustment difficulties was not as easy as they had thought. "It was difficult that we lost the direct support from the extended family back in Hong Kong. Housework became another issue. When in Hong Kong we had maids in our house, so we could actually forget about the everyday chores. But now we had to take on all the housework by ourselves. Parenting also took a lot of my time and energy. The reality was discouraging. It very often did not live up to what we had planned and dreamed of before we came."

Language difficulty emerged as a big barrier even though KM was educated in English in Hong Kong. "I had not predicted that language could be a big problem for me because of my accent in speaking English. This put some obstacles in communication."

"Actually my family wanted to be more Canadian in our way of life. We tried to grab every chance to learn more about this society, and to integrate ourselves into the new culture. For example, instead of going to a Chinese church, we chose to go to an English speaking church. In this sense, I welcomed and was looking for 'culture shock'. I would rather have more such shocks than preserving my sense of stability within the small circle of my own ethnicity."

Finding a job happened quite quickly for KM. He was hired by a local company, working as a technician operating robotics in an assembly line. But six months later, he was laid-off because of the drop of the company's sales. KM considered this event as "the most difficult experience" he confronted in his life after coming to Canada. He then worked as
a self-employed driving instructor until he became a full time student a year ago. A major enjoyment derived from this job was listening to people's stories. "A lot of my students were new immigrants. After several hours of driving classes on the road, they started to talk about their own stories. The benefit of that seemed twofold. Not only did it make students feel less stressful in road exercises, but it also increased my interest in others' life, and my skills in interpersonal encounters."

In the summer of 1996, KM's wife was admitted into the PhD program in counselling psychology at UBC. "I felt great joy for that, and it was my happiest moment during that period of time. The counselling profession always had a very positive image in my mind. I had friends who were counsellors in Hong Kong." KM started to read literature in the field. "I discovered that these readings were something that I was quite capable of understanding. I agreed with a lot of viewpoints and arguments presented by many theories. Well, this might be an area that I can manage and explore, I thought."

Other circumstances also had influenced KM's decision for career change. His attempts to pursue the graduate engineering program and the MBA program at UBC were not successful. KM decided to change his career direction.

Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training

KM enrolled into the Guidance Diploma program in counselling psychology at UBC in August of 1997. The learning content in the first semester was "very natural" to KM. Courses such as abnormal psychology and statistics involved intensive lecturing and many examinations. "They were very academic. I worked very hard and did very well. So, there were really no surprises. I felt quite comfortable in learning and utilizing the new skills
required in writing academic papers, for example, to use APA style in my written assignments."

However, when participating in courses in counsellor training, things became quite different. "My feeling was that things in this phase had switched from academic study to a more personal level. Courses like basic counselling interviewing skills made me look into things related to my personal growth: my own qualities as a person and as a counsellor, my own strength and weaknesses, my relationship and interaction with others, and so on. It was quite a different experience. The adjustment was not as smooth as I had hoped, and it was difficult for me." In the counselling basic interview skills course, KM found it "really difficult" to be involved in his clients' stories on a very personal basis sharing feelings. He was "afraid of" such close personal contact for two reasons. First, he again felt the deficiency of his English in oral communication. The second and perhaps more important reason was that he realized how emotionally powerful it could be when working in this profession, and exploring feelings was really not something he was used to.

Class participation was also a challenge. "This was very different from my undergraduate and graduate studies in Hong Kong, where mainly you just listened to your professors' lectures. So when I started my training here, I was quite concerned that I would face serious difficulties. But it turned out that I actually adjusted to the situation much better than I had expected. But I am sure that the requirement of class participation could have been a huge obstacle for me if I had not worked in my previous career as a trainer in Hong Kong. I guess I was just lucky in this regard."

Doing group work seemed to be another challenging task in the beginning. "I felt
quite difficult to work with someone I did not know that well. It seemed even more difficult when I needed to work harmoniously with people of different cultural background. But my concerns gradually faded away. Colleagues in the group were usually collaborative. They were helping each others, and contributing a lot to the process. So, I soon enjoyed it."

A further challenge was to increase language proficiency. "My vocabulary in engineering English did not help with my counselling situations. I was pretty quick in picking up abstract jargon and technical terms related to counselling theories. But when it came to training in a real counselling situation, it was very different. You sat with a client and tried to capture his or her emotions. It was just so difficult at that instant! There were no standard words in English you could use in every minute. I was trying so hard to find the most appropriate expressions to communicate with my client, but what were these words? I would always let my client elaborate first, making sure I understood what had been said. Then, I tried to follow the meanings and flow of statements closely in order to help myself capture the kind of feelings and thinking expressed by my client. Once I found my perception was correct, I would then expand and go deeper on what was on the table. That approach usually worked well, and it helped me to make myself clear first, and then, to convey and attend the more exact meanings of the conversation."

KM found that he could also benefit from his language problems. "I noticed that my disadvantage constantly reminded me to reflect on what my client had intended to express. As a result, I avoided to give quick advice that may not be well appreciated and received by my client."
Similarly, KM’s perception on people and culture seemed to facilitate his confidence in communication. "Despite different cultures, I found that the basic human nature is more alike than different. People from different cultures actually have many basic things in common." This perspective helped him to interact with others, i.e., professors, fellow trainees, and clients in simulation counselling sessions, in a more relaxed and open manner.

"As a trainee from Asian culture, being humble and respectful was a natural virtue in my sub-consciousness. I felt uncomfortable to dominate the whole questioning time in class discussion. When others wanted to talk, I would let them go first. Also, before asking a question, I always scrutinized it carefully, making sure it was really relevant to the training context, and would not be a waste of other people’s time. I noticed that some of my colleagues here would approach the same thing very differently. They seemed to be much more self-centred; they were very spontaneous and individualistic. They would dominate the discussion period, going on and on with what they considered as the more important questions. This phenomenon sometimes bothered me quite a bit."

Nonetheless, KM’s overall feeling of being a counsellor trainee at UBC was very positive. "I think the general environment was very supportive here. It was easy for me to get access to the admissions and graduate advisors if I wanted. The staff in the office was always very helpful. It was also nice that the department organized academic seminars regularly, so I had the opportunity to attend very good presentations delivered by academics of a rich variety of backgrounds. They were truly great, and I enjoyed them a lot."

The general training environment was always pleasant. KM particularly appreciated the fact that although there were trainees from different ethnic background attending the
training program, he was respected by others, and never felt that his ethnic minority identity had ever hindered his learning and training process. "I also developed friendship with colleagues by joining a study group outside the classroom setting. This kind of friendship was quite significant for me because it assisted me to build my network and social circle in the host culture."

Support from professors was great. "As an adult student coming back to school to pursue a totally new career, acceptance and recognition from professors was quite important for me. I was quite sensitive to what my professors would say about my work, particular those professors in the Canadian main stream culture. It turned out that they were very supportive."

Family support was critical. "Whenever I heard positive comments concerning my capacity as a counsellor trainee from my wife, I was so encouraged and validated. My wife and I were thinking to work together in counselling profession as a team." KM also felt quite inspired when hearing positive remarks concerning his training performance from his friends who were also professionals in the counselling field.

The availability of financial resources helped with his training. "I was always very confident that if things get tight, I have no problem to go back to work a few days or several hours, full-time or part time, just to make the ends meet. Besides, my wife kept her job working part-time as a research assistant."

KM was very clear that his career goal in the immediate future would be to get into the Master's program in counselling psychology. "The bottom line was simple and clear: it was extremely important for me to get good grades. I set up minimum standard for myself
in this regard. That was, try to get no less than an 'A-' for all my courses. But at the same
time I am the kind of person who really doesn't bother about the grades when getting
interested in an area. I went beyond what I was required to do by the courses."

Parallel to gaining knowledge and skills, KM could feel that he started a personal
journey of self-exploration. "It was the first time in my life to talk about what I had
experienced, and to get in touch with my true face. It was so reflective that I was
reconstructing myself, and at the same time, making me a more open and understandable
person to myself. I used to keep a large portion of my emotion within. But once this kind
of self-exploration started, it opened my relationship with others. It would have been
unimaginable for me to share how I felt with my friends, relatives, or even my wife in the
past. But now I was much more open. I was able to overcome my internal barriers and
share with others how I felt."

"I have experienced personal change and growth. This was worthwhile even if
eventually I may not be able to get into the graduate program. If so, there will still be no
feeling of sorry or regret because I have already seen the benefit. That made me feel very
good about my initial decision to become a counsellor trainee."

KM planned to stay on course with his career goals. "I definitely will go for my
counsellor profession. Counselling clients in special education context, cross-cultural
counselling, and career counselling are just some of the areas I can think of at the moment.
I sometimes found my goals were expanding." KM was envisioning his career development
with a sense of optimism. "There would be all kinds of opportunities. Continuing to build
my career in Canada is one option. I may go back to Hong Kong, or go to set a practice
in China, where counselling professionals, especially professionals working in vocational
counselling, are expected to be in great demand."

The Summary of MY’s Story

Demographics

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Married with two children, MY was 41 years of age at the time of this interview. She just finished her first-year of study in the M.A. program in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Having six siblings, MY was born and grew up in Hong Kong.

Beginning: Before Coming to Canada

"I remember as a small child I would come home from school, and start doing the homework by myself. Nobody had to tell me to do that, and I would work very hard on it. I’ve always been that way, never letting things slip by."

Music has long been MY’s favourite pastime. "I have two part-time jobs at the moment: working for a church as a secretary, and conducting the church choir at the same time. I like that conductor’s job a lot. It is a bit stressful, but it gives me a great
enjoyment."

To facilitate her interests in music and singing, MY left Hong Kong for the United States in 1977, and obtained a B.A degree in music (singing) from Dickson College in Pennsylvania in 1980. "I wanted to do something with my music degree, but not to perform, which was something I considered as being too stressful. So I moved on to Indiana University at Bloomington pursuing a master's degree in arts administration." The initial transition to student life in the USA was "quite a culture shock" for MY. Some of the strategies she utilized to cope with the adjustment included hard-work, self-talk, and participating in campus activities that would integrate her into the main stream culture.

With her M.A. degree in arts administration, MY returned to Hong Kong in late 1982. "I was really lucky. By the end of that year, I got an offer to work for a dance company. At first I was hired to do the marketing work. One year later, I moved up to become the administrator of the company. The company was just taking off when my career started there. It was like I was growing with the company, and I learned a lot from this experience."

In late 1986, MY switched to work as a marketing administrator for Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra. She stayed in that position for 8 years until 1994 when she immigrated to Canada. "Everything in this well-established organization was much more structured, formal, hierarchical, and most of all, bigger." After the first two years, MY found that she was professionally well-established. However, as time went by, MY's interest in that occupation gradually faded. This feeling became stronger during her last two years working in the orchestra. "I started thinking that maybe I didn't like it anymore. The high
stress level could be one reason. Also, I found the work lacked of challenge. But I am a person who likes new challenges in life."

The contemplation for her career change coincided with the decision-making process of immigrating to Canada. "You would make preparations beforehand when you were going to make such a big move in your life, like immigrating to a new country. But there was only so much you could prepare because you were entering unknowns. My sister had been living in Canada for many years. So, my husband and I knew very well that it would be hard for us to get a job. We were psychologically prepared. We told ourselves not to be picky in terms of which kind of job might be available, and how much we could be paid for; we might just have to grab anything that could get us started."

Middle: Initial Adjustment

The whole family came to North Vancouver, British Columbia in June of 1994. Although having been here for short visits before, the initial period of adjustment to the new life in Canada was accompanied by a sense of uncertainty and stress for MY and her family. "A book says that new immigrants will endure stress regardless of how well-prepared they are, and how welcoming the new environment is to them, and I think it is very true." MY's previous living experience in the States helped her know some general norms of living in North America. Having her sister living here to help out was also a benefit to her adjustment. Nonetheless, MY indicated that the first six months of living here "was not the happiest time" in her life.

The biggest stressor was the sense of financial insecurity caused by the anxiety of not finding a job. According to MY, things like getting to know the new place, and to settle
down her school-aged children in the new environment, were all her concerns at the time. However, like most new immigrants, she felt that getting a job was the key to getting adjusted to other areas of life. "Having a job gives you at least a sense of security financially, and then you would have a better mood to learn the place, the people, and many other new things."

Things were coming along gradually, even though this transition period lasted much longer than MY had originally anticipated. "It was only this past year did we (MY and her family) get a more solid feeling of having settled down. Of course it helped a great deal when my husband got a steady job in the beginning of 1995: it gave everybody in the family a feeling of big relief." MY started a part-time job in August of 1994. Although it was not a job she enjoyed, she decided to hold it until her husband was employed. When this happened, MY quit her job, and started a small business, i.e., a consignment clothing store selling used clothes. MY stayed with this business for a year and a half, while her husband was consolidating his position in his workplace.

Coinciding with this period of general life adjustment, MY was going through a deep experience of self-exploration. In coping with various life tasks such as parenting, seeking employment, getting familiar with the new place and people, and the like, one thing that MY had always kept contemplating was her own life career planning. This journey of self-inquiry had started before coming to Canada. "These few years had been the process of getting to know myself. It was not only related to what career option I wanted to consider, but more broadly, about what I wanted to do as a person in my life."
"I saw myself moving gradually to things more related to social welfare, and getting into things more to do with people. I found myself enjoying meeting with people, talking with people, and working with people." Being the owner of the clothing store appeared to have added to MY's growing interest in people. "I was meeting people every day. I noticed that there were many people who actually wanted others to listen to their personal stories. That was fascinating..." MY realized that she was not keen on the business part of the work she was doing. Instead, she was enjoying the people-contact that the entrepreneurship had brought to her. At the same time, MY was working as a volunteer facilitator for an English conversation group in the North Shore Multicultural Society in North Vancouver. She was teaching a weekly class of 15 new immigrants to learn English conversation, and she enjoyed that experience a great deal.

"What can I do with these interests like helping others and listening to them?" MY came to the conclusion that she wanted to pursue this interest further, and get formal training in a helping profession. Studying counselling psychology surfaced as a desirable option. MY closed down her business. She first enrolled into the guidance diploma program in 1997, and was later admitted to the Master's program at UBC in January 1998.

**Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training**

It had been 17 years since MY finished her last Master's degree in Art administration. Time had passed and so many things had changed in her life. As a returning student, MY was facing new challenges in coordinating the roles she now had to play: a worker, a spouse, a student, and most of all, a parent. "I did not find the study itself too much a problem. It was only at the very beginning, maybe the first one or two months, I
had to take a bit of extra effort to adjust to the studying atmosphere, like getting back to the 'school-mood'. I usually was able to start study only after my kids had gone to bed. I was already very tired, and staying up late at night was a bit difficult. Also, even when kids were at school, I sometimes found it difficult to concentrate at home. But soon I got over that.

In the meantime, MY was working at a part-time job with the church, she was a freelance writer for a weekly magazine in Hong Kong, and a volunteer worker in a transition house for women and children from abusive families in North Vancouver. These things added to the busy schedule she already had to struggle with. But for MY, these aspects of her worklife were either financially necessary or personally meaningful. A coping strategy she adopted was to take some guidance diploma courses through distance education. In this way, she got a more flexible study schedule and worked hard to maintain her self-motivation and self-discipline.

With her husband's full-time employment and her own part-time working income, MY did not feel the financial restraint that could have become a concern in her studies. Rather, the challenge came from having to "juggle with different roles I took on." As such, she had to learn to coordinate and cope with these roles simultaneously in her student career. "All my coping effort would not be possible without my husband's understanding and support."

A challenge MY faced in her counsellor training was something parallel to her previous experiences when doing degree studies in the United States. "There was too much self-awareness in me about expressing myself. When I was taking the basic counselling
interviewing skill course, I kept asking myself whether I was expressing myself and communicating with my client correctly. 'Am I understanding and reflecting the client’s feeling?' 'Am I able to conceptualize the situation?' Concerns like these emerged frequently. These concerns were likely caused by my personality of being too mindful. I was often over-conscious about my personal limitations, and not having enough self-confidence. This sort of desire for perfection caused anxiety feelings."

The lack of self-confidence was also reflected in how MY felt about her writing skill. "I did very well in my papers but somehow, I still had the sort of belief that the professors were either being lenient or not that demanding in terms of writing standards. It could also be that rather than paying attention to my writing skill, the professors were more concentrating on the good ideas I presented in my papers. My husband always said that I was just being too demanding of myself, and I think he was right."

Although recognizing the fact that counselling psychology is a very language-intensive program to study, MY did not feel that she was hindered by English language difficulty during her training. She did have self-doubts, however, and these were fueled by her desire for perfection and her lack of self-confidence. MY recalled that sometimes she went through the same experience when expressing herself in her mother tongue.

Another fresh experience was student participation in the learning process. MY could feel the encouragement as well as the pressure to contribute more in the process. "I knew very well that being in the graduate level, it was no longer just taking in the lecturing content. It is about investigation, sharing ideas, and creativity." But still, she sometimes found it hard to gear herself to this learning structure. "I still felt that sometimes I was not
used to using my mind in such a manner during the class. For example, when a question was asked, you had to get your mind going right away. I was not used to responding to such immediate exchanges."

While feeling challenged, MY enjoyed the openness aspect of this interactive training format. "I had absolutely no trouble to enjoy the essential principles in this process. I think that’s the way it should be. That is how you learn. The professors learn things from this process too as they don’t have the answers to everything. So I think that’s good." MY felt that one’s attitude in sharing was important. She recalled one instance that happened in her basic counselling interviewing skills course. Rather than sharing opinions, one fellow trainee seemed to have a tendency to challenge what others had to say. That made MY feel a bit uncomfortable. "Regardless what kind of culture you were in, it was about sharing knowledge in order to learn, and it should reflect a sense of mutual respect, tolerance, and sincerity."

Being "really shy" in social situations, MY tried to put additional effort to adjust to the interactive and participatory learning environment. "It seems that I have come a long way from whom I was to whom I am now: I feel very comfortable to be interactive in the classes and training process nowadays. I assume that my previous working experience in Hong Kong had contributed positively in my current adjustment, that is, my confidence in public speaking. I did not consider doing class presentation as a big hassle. This was something expected and I was used to it. I may still get nervous in such occasions, but I know once I get up there and start talking, I’ll do well."
One thing MY enjoyed was the "people oriented culture" in the training environment. She was always able to find support and encouragement from her colleagues. "Everybody was supportive. We shared information, shared our own ups and downs though I wish I could have even closer contact with my colleagues." MY regretted the fact that she had to do the study on a part-time basis to facilitate her busy schedule. That reality limited her chance to have more contacts with people.

Similarly, the professors in the program were also very positive and supportive. "I felt that I could communicate with them and ask for help whenever I needed." However, MY was not impressed by an incident that occurred in one of her correspondence courses. Although the instructor seemed to be nice, he did not offer the concrete assistance that MY asked for. MY assumed that this might be more related to his own personal style of not wanting to do more work. "This was just one isolated case but otherwise I had very good experiences with all the courses I took."

With good effort, MY received very good feedback and grades for her course work. This strengthened her confidence and the positive feeling about her training. She tried to look at her academic competence more broadly. "Getting good grades was important for me. But it was equally important that I had really learned something from the training experience."

A common feature that MY was able to draw between her previous work experience and her present training in counselling psychology was "the people element". As an administrator in a musical art organization, dealing with people, such as colleagues, the media, the audience, and the general public, was a very essential part of MY's prior
career. "Compared to my past experience, I have to say that counsellor training has made me feel much more confident and effective in communication. More importantly, deep inside me, I have become more interested in people."

Looking back at her part-time training experience for the last two years, MY was very reflective. "It's been like a growing experience for me, and the self-understanding is rewarding. I think it is very important for me to feel this way as eventually I have to work face to face with a client. I would know that these things such as self-learning, self-exploration, and self-understanding can hopefully work for my client as well. This would make my helping profession more concrete and meaningful."

This on-going experience highlighted a personal direction in constructing a new career. The more MY was involved in her training, the more open she became about her future career plan. She recalls that even after she entered the counsellor education program, she still could not be absolutely sure that this was really something she wanted to stick with. It was a gradual process and eventually she concluded that she was on the right career path. "I'm still leaving it open because we change all the time. Along with the journey of self-discovery, I may find, at some point in time, something else that is even more interesting, meaningful, and challenging, and something that can utilize my strengths and assets even more effectively."

While keeping at her present endeavour to become a professional counsellor, MY holds an open and welcoming attitude toward "new learning experience and adventures" that would enrich her life career development. Similarly, she is still in the process of identifying her particular area of concentration in the counselling field. "I leave it very open for now."
As I get to know more about the features of each focal area such as family and marriage counselling, school counselling, and cross-cultural counselling, I would naturally reach the decision of pursuing a more appropriate option."

The Summary of SD’s Story

Demographics

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At the time of this interview, SD was 55 years of age. He was at his second year of Master's degree study in counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC). A father of two children, SD was originally from a large and wealthy family in a Middle East country.

Beginning: Before Coming to Canada

SD obtained grade-12 education in his home country. "From the beginning it was all planned that once I finished high school in my home country, I would go abroad. So, at age 18, I was sent to England. First, it took me a couple of years to study English. Then I entered the University of Kingston in the south of London, majoring in mechanical
engineering." After obtaining his BSc degree, SD worked for awhile in England. He then went back to school, and acquired a postgraduate diploma in industrial engineering and administration from the University of Cranfield in England. SD enjoyed reading. "Even during my engineering years I always read self-help books and pop psychology and I have always been interested in counselling."

After staying in England for about 10 years, SD went back to his home country. "As my father had passed away before that, I came back home to look after family business, while working in a big corporation in a managerial position. Although I started my career in management, I later switched to industrial consulting work, and became heavily involved in it for about eight years."

SD was well-connected with, and well-respected by his business colleagues and clients. "In fact my management style was very much human oriented. It was like a part of my nature. So I always made some effort and paid attention towards that aspect in my consulting. I was always interested in making people think what was inside them. I did not consider my work as only a means of making money for an industry and myself; I often focused on making a business corporation a better place for people who were working there. The goals of my industrial clients never coincided exactly to what I wanted to do. That was why I chose to work with projects and clients that I felt more comfortable with, and I enjoyed my consulting career a lot."

Because of his prior experience of living abroad, SD had long hoped that his children could be brought up in a Western country like Canada. "I had been educated in England but my wife had never been outside of our home country. I felt that (living abroad) would do
her good to see another lifestyle and other environments, and make her more broad-minded in looking at life." To pursue his interest in counselling psychology was another reason. "I thought coming over here (Canada) would give me the opportunity to start school again."

The decision was easily made, and the preparation for immigration went smoothly. "I was very well travelled around the world, for example, the Far East, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States, not only during my years in England, but also afterwards when working in industrial consulting in my own country. I was very well informed about Canada. So, when I was in London on one of my business trips, I went to the Canadian High Commission there and applied for immigration in the independent category. In fact, when I was later interviewed by a Canadian official there, he said that I had chosen the best part of Canada because in my application form I indicated my intention to come to Vancouver."

Middle: Initial Adjustment

Everything went very smoothly. SD's application was soon approved. He and his family came to Vancouver in June of 1989. SD could hardly tell that he himself was experiencing strange feelings. "Culture shocks were certainly not for me. Between age 18 and 28, I spent almost all of my youth time in England. And then, I had been to many Western countries many times, including the United States. So, Western culture, especially European lifestyle, was something I had been used to already." He spoke English very well, felt comfortable in communicating with people, and did not feel isolated or alienated in this new environment.

Affluent financial capacity was another key factor that supported a sense of security
and comfort. Unlike many new immigrants, SD did not have to worry about financial survival for his family due to his personal financial resources. "Everything was almost perfect. Some friends had come here six months prior to my family's arrival. So, I asked them to rent a furnished apartment for my family. Three months later, my family bought a new house in West Vancouver, where we have lived ever since."

SD travelled back and forth between his home country and Canada for his business. "I had to fly back to my home country several times the first year. In later years, I would go there twice a year, staying for two to three months each time. But nowadays, I usually go back there once a year, staying for about two months." In the first two years, SD usually would be able to stay with his family for a maximum of two months in Vancouver before he had to fly back to his home country for his next business trip. Life was quite busy, and SD basically utilized his short stays here as leisure times. "Once I came back to Canada, my schedule was always full. Of course, I needed to spend time with my kids, and with other things like getting to know the city better, reading books on counselling psychology, and looking at different courses and programs offered in different places. By the way, there were often little things in the house that needed to be fixed, and they also kept me busy."

SD enjoyed his life in Vancouver. "As a matter of fact, if you wanted to ask me whether I had experienced any kind of difficulties in these initial years of coming to this country, my answer would be a 'NO.' Even if there had been small obstacles, I guess they were too trivial to impress me. That's why I do not recall any unpleasant incidents, but good experiences only."

SD gradually lessened his involvement in his business work, and devoted more of
his time and energy to actualize his long-time interest in pursuing counselling psychology. In 1992, almost three years after coming to Canada, SD completed a condensed hypnotherapy certificate program at the Counsellor's Training Institute, a private college in Vancouver. In the beginning of 1995, he obtained the certification from Dr. William Glasser's Reality Therapy Institute in Los Angeles. "I was doing a lot of reading, and attending different courses. For example, I also attended many courses/workshops at the Justice Institute (of B.C.) such as negotiation skills, anger management, and mediation."

Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training

Studying on a part-time basis, SD enrolled in the Guidance Diploma Program in counselling psychology at UBC in September, 1994. After receiving a Guidance Diploma, SD was admitted to the Master's degree program in counselling psychology at UBC in September of 1997.

Coming back to university brought new experience to SD. "At first, I was feeling a bit unfamiliar with what I was encountering. After all, I had not been to a university learning setting for more than 25 years. Also, the university system here was actually quite different from the one I had gone through in England. It was not as smooth as I had expected in the beginning. I definitely had a thirst for knowledge but when it came to assignments, it was pretty challenging for me because I was neither a fast reader nor a fast writer. The subject of engineering and its vocabulary was far different from that of counselling psychology. The English I had acquired from my previous career did not help with my current needs in counsellor training. I had to spend a lot of time on both my readings and writings when taking counselling courses. Otherwise, I didn't feel I was able
to digest them well to the level that I felt satisfied with."

A coping strategy SD adopted was to pursue his training at a slower pace. "There was no path for a short-cut. If I wanted to do a good and thorough job, I had to devote more time to it. An ordinary student would take 3 or 4 courses and spend a few hours for each course. I would take one or two courses, but the amount of my studying time was at least equivalent to those colleagues who were taking four courses. This method worked for me, even though it prolonged my study."

SD felt quite comfortable with the interactive and experiential learning format in his training process although it differed substantially from his previous student experience in the UK. "Studying engineering in those days followed a much more formal and rigid structure. You didn't argue with your lecturer, and you addressed him as Sir, and you never called him by his first name." According to SD, there were two important personal attributes that made his adjustment much easier. First, an open and easy-going personal style helped him to adopt a positive attitude in accepting new things in his training. Second, his age might be an asset in providing him with more maturity and confidence in dealing with changes. "Things like class presentations and group work were all fine for me, and I really didn't feel intimidated by these new forms of learning experiences. I enjoyed working with colleagues in groups. However, I did notice that not all individuals in every group were good partners. A few of them tended to leave the workload to others, and intended to do less work themselves. Whenever this occurred, I did not feel comfortable with it."

Overall, he enjoyed a collegial atmosphere during his training. "Colleagues have been very close and we have been in touch by phone. I felt quite comfortable with the
general learning environment that was open, friendly, and supportive. I never experienced any kind of prejudice toward me, perhaps a small number of my fellow trainees were a little bit reserved when they approached me. My impression was that they were just lacking knowledge about how to interact with me, but not that they had any bias against me."

Similarly, support from professors appeared to be vital in facilitating SD’s training experience. "Most professors and instructors were very approachable. It was easy for me to get the help from my professors when I was in need. I found it very helpful that professors really considered the workload of their students, and openly negotiated their agenda and expectations on assignments with the trainees. This helped me feel more clear about the training objectives, and get more focused on my effort."

To SD, the meaningful support from the professors should also be based on the foundation of quality teaching and scholarly and professional competence. "It gives me a sense of confidence and comfort when I can really experience such competence. For example, when I had a question, I was expecting to get a clear explanation or demonstration from my professor/supervisor so that I would eventually grasp what I was supposed to know. This meant a lot to me in terms of real support, and fortunately, I was usually satisfied with what I got in this kind of situation."

There were other teaching-related aspects that could either facilitate or hinder the quality of SD’s training experience. He found he learned much better when a course was well-organized with considerable substance. "I didn’t mind that the organization of a course or a training process following a more flexible and open path. However, I felt frustrated about, and not benefiting from the learning if I saw that instead of sticking with the general
relevancy of the main topic, a class was being taken over by a few students with their own interests and agenda. This sort of thing was too individualistic to happen."

Accommodating the students' needs for note-taking was also important in a training context. "I am not a fast-speed note taker. But I wanted to record important points on the transparency overheads shown by professors and instructors. So, I truly appreciated that I was given a copy of the overheads and lecture outline. This always facilitated greatly my learning. Rather than making notes very frantically, I could comfortably putting my mind on the lecture content, and didn't have to worry that I might miss something important."

The most favourable subject matters for SD were courses connected with practical applications, and skills training with hands-on experience. "I usually felt quite relaxed and comfortable in skill simulation exercises and clinical training. I didn't mind if my performance was being supervised or watched by others. For me, this kind of anxiety was really minimal as I welcomed others' comments on how I did in a counselling situation. I thought I would benefit from others' opinions. I focused more on the productive side of the picture when receiving feedback from my supervisors and fellow trainees."

To obtain good, concrete, and instant feedback from his professors was important. "I particularly value this kind of feedback because it was really where I found the resources to learn, and to improve my skills. But unfortunately, there were occasions I didn't get much feedback on assignments until receiving the final grade of the course. There was a particular course I recall, I got 90% as a final grade. But I was not happy with that course because I never got feedback for each assignment I did. What I had wanted was individual feedback on each piece of my work so I would have had a clear sense of What, Why, and
How in terms of my work quality. Personally speaking, such feedback was much more meaningful to my learning than a simple good grade."

The more SD has learned in his training, the more he feels that he wants to learn. To enrich himself with more knowledge and skills, SD often took extra courses that were not a part of compulsory requirements for his degree program. "I did that solely for my own interest. My quest for learning extra things came naturally from my intrinsic motivation. I was really not pushed or forced to change my career because of the external factors, but rather, it was totally something I wanted to pursue. That made a huge difference."

SD thought that his off-campus counselling practice had also increased his interest and enriched his training experience. "It was complementary and supplementary to my on-campus counsellor training. The learning that happened in these two contexts went hand-in-hand, and they interplayed very well to each other."

SD reflected on his growing experience as a counsellor trainee. "I have definitely raised my self-awareness and self-understanding to a new level. With this basis, I have become more capable in coping with things in my personal life, and become more understanding and skilful in interpersonal relationships. I value these gains very much".

SD was highly self-motivated to continue his present endeavour. "I certainly aim at a Ph.D. degree after I finish with my Master's level training. If not so, I would like to continue taking complimentary courses and attending seminars in the department. I would like to keep in touch with professors here and learn about new books and new trends in our profession. I look at learning as a life-long pursuit."

Personal interest, rather than financial gain, would be SD’s focus on his future career
development in the counselling field. "I don't see myself become a counsellor who works full-time. I would like to see as many clients a day as I would enjoy for I do not intend to depend on my counselling income for living. Then, I would have the freedom and personal space to spend sufficient and quality time in my counselling practice rather than rushing through one session after another. I hope I would have the luxury of looking at counselling more for the sake of satisfying my own sense of vocation, that is, to be an effective and good helper to my prospective clients. To me, counselling does not mean a simple job; it is a part of the meaningful life content I enjoy."

The Summary of SK's Story

Demographics

<table>
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<th>Country of Origin:</th>
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<td>Years of Counsellor Training:</td>
<td>1 year (completed Guidance Diploma)</td>
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<td>Funding Support:</td>
<td>Self-supported</td>
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SK was 27 years of age at the time of this interview. She obtained a Guidance Diploma in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC) a year ago, and worked as a student advisor at a private college in Victoria, B.C. The younger daughter...
of a two-child family, SK was born and raised in Osaka, Japan.

Beginning: Before Coming to Canada

SK has always been very close to her family, and her parents have always supported her education. "I attended Kwansei Gakuin University at Kobe, Japan. While doing very well in my course work, I was also coaching others to play tennis on campus in my spare time. It was rewarding when you see people have learned something and got improved (of their skills) because of your help."

Meanwhile, SK also worked as a part-time instructor in a private school in Osaka, teaching grade eight and grade nine level English and mathematics. "I paid attention to my students' psychological needs, and tried hard to facilitate and encourage them while teaching them academic skills. I got along with my students well, and enjoyed this work experience." The pay SK received from her teaching job was good, and she was able to put most of it aside for her personal savings.

SK obtained her BA degree in sociology in March 1994. "Having graduated from the university, you usually go to work for a company for several years. Then, you quit the job when you get married. You become a housewife for the rest of your life. This is a kind of typical and traditional lifestyle which is still true to many Japanese women nowadays. But this way of life was not appealing to me. Although my desire seemed vague, one thing I was sure about was that I would like to do something different, something interesting. I guess my saving money was a preparation for what I would do."

"I realized that studying English abroad had been a personal desire for me since I was a child. My parents were very supportive to what I wanted to do. Another person I also
consulted with was one of my university professors in Japan. She was like a mentor to me, and I respected her opinion a lot. The professor had lived in Canada before, and knew many things about the country. Naturally, I decided to come to study in Canada." In retrospect, SK felt that she had not been "psychologically well-prepared" for her life in Canada. "I was more excited than being nervous about what my student life would be in Canada. Possible difficulties were underestimated or ignored."

**Middle: Initial Adjustment**

SK came to Camosun College in Victoria, British Columbia, in April 1994, enrolling in the ESL (English as a Second Language) class. "School began in May. I met a lot of fellow students and school staff. This made me feel a lot better in dealing with the initial nervousness. Everything was new. To me, Canadian people were more like foreigners. You know, from my Japanese perspective, 'foreigner' really meant non-Japanese. I also met a lot of fellow students from other cultures. It was quite exciting."

Unfortunately, the initial excitement was soon overshadowed by SK's distressful relationship with her host-family. "I was 22 years old at the time, very young, first time travelling to a foreign country. So, I joined Camosun College's home-stay program for international students. I don't know if it was a cultural difference or just a conflict of different individual styles. The host family was a Canadian couple with no children. I think that they were doing that (acting as the host-family) just for money. I was told that I could only take a shower within five minutes so the hot water can be saved; laundry was allowed only once a week, and if it was nice outside, hang the clothes out, and do not use the dryer, so the electricity can be saved; the food was terrible...just like that. As a new comer, I
wasn't sure how to deal with that. I assumed that this kind of phenomena might be normal here. Although I did not really say anything, I was not happy about what was going on."

SK soon decided to do something about her situation. "I went to see the coordinator of the home-stay program at the college, and I was switched to another host-family. This second host family was good. It was a young couple with their little daughter. The girl liked me a lot, and her parents were more outgoing and open. We got along well, and I was quite happy staying with them for 10 months."

SK's studies went well and she successfully completed grade 12 ESL within 4 months. In September of 1994, she was qualified to take university transfer courses as a regular college student. "In the next one and a half year, I took courses in various subjects including English, psychology, and mathematics for the purpose of improving my English." Language difficulty surfaced as a major psychological barrier for her studies. "Most of my fellow students were Canadian students in regular classes, and I felt intimidated. I found it was very difficult for me to participate in class activities such as discussions and group work. The most difficult thing for me, I guess, was that even though I knew what they were talking about, I felt too embarrassed and nervous to speak out. I felt like an outsider who was physically present but psychologically absent from the group."

Parallel to her academic life, SK began to build her social circle in the new environment. "I started to make new friends in ESL classes. I particularly felt the need to connect with Canadian friends so I would get myself more integrated into the mainstream group. What I did was that I started to volunteer in the Japanese class in the same college I was studying. Usually those students who spoke English as their first language, of whom
a majority were Caucasians, were interested in studying Japanese. In this way, I started to meet new people, and make Caucasian friends, and friends who spoke English as their first language."

The thing that SK enjoyed most in this initial transition period was "being with people". She liked the learning experience as a whole although she did not particularly enjoy class discussions and group activities. She also experienced a sense of personal growth. "I found that I had become much more motivated, self-directed, and hard-working than ever before. I realized that I had come all the way here, and I had to be successful. Probably it's like a re-discovery of self-motivation."

At Camosun College, SK met the international student counsellor working there. "Having talked to her for several times, I found she was a very nice person who was really supportive and helpful. I was deeply impressed, and wish I could be a helper like her. The counsellor, who actually had her master's degree from the counselling psychology program at UBC, became a sort of role model to me. I also enjoyed the subject of psychology, and got a lot of support from a psychology professor at the college. These people led me to think seriously of pursuing counselling psychology as my major of study."

Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training

SK started her Guidance diploma program in counselling psychology at UBC in the beginning of July, 1996. Although having lived in Canada for two years now, SK realized that she was facing situations somewhat similar to what she had encountered when she first came to this country. "I did not have friends in Vancouver. I was lonely again. By then, I had made some good friends in Victoria so, it was hard. I would quite often go back to
Victoria during the weekend visiting my friends there."

A first-time trainee in the field, SK felt the subject of counselling psychology was interesting. "I did very well in my first elective in abnormal psychology. It was a lecture and multiple-choice-exam type of course. I really did not feel much pressure. However, the real challenge arose when I started my courses in counselling psychology. I realized that most counselling courses require active intellectual exchanges within the classroom setting. Also, the course format often tends to be interactive and experiential. I was doing okay in group projects as I felt comfortable with my English by then."

The basic counselling interviewing skill course was very hard for SK. "I felt the training was like a sudden switch of my mind to a totally unknown area. The most difficult part was how to express, and the use of vocabulary. I guess it came down to the issue of English language difficulty. Even in Japanese, it is difficult to express my feelings. It became even more difficult when I had to do it in English."

During the training, students were required to role-play counsellors and clients. This became a demanding and tough task that SK had to struggle with. "I felt uncomfortable to talk about my personal feelings and concerns to somebody whom I really did not know. In the client-counsellor role-playing exercises, which were a heavy part of the training, I felt awkward in being in the role of the client, not only because of concerns of my English expressions, but much more; because of my uncomfortableness toward talking about self, which I still do sometimes. Likewise, I didn't experience any ease or comfort when I was in the role of a counsellor."

The expectation for active class participation such as discussions and presentations
still remain a challenging task for SK. "When studying in the university in Japan, I never had to do class presentations and group projects, and all my classes followed a lecture-format. But now, class participation was an important part of my counsellor training program. It was very new to me. I wasn’t comfortable with it, but had to do it."

Professors’ teaching style seemed to have a significant impact on how SK felt about the training. "I guess it depends very much on each professor’s teaching style. I felt intimidated and overwhelmed in some classes, while feeling quite comfortable and relaxed with other professors’ who were friendly and facilitative. This seemed very similar to my experience with professors in Japan. I assume it was more an issue of personal style rather than cultural differences." Generally speaking, SK felt that the training environment was positive and supportive to her. "Good relationship with classmates and professors tended to be one of the most important factors that would facilitate my study. I think that I got good support from others, especially from my professors in my program of study."

Another crucial source of support was from her family. "Even though I did not talk to them (family members) over the phone for weeks, I felt okay because they were always there for me. If I have not talked to a friend for a long time, I may feel insecure, and wonder if she does not like me any more. But for my family, I knew I would always get support from them."

In the middle of her training, financial concerns emerged as her personal savings were used up. "My parents were supporting me not only psychologically, but financially as well. They started to send me money to cover my cost in living and studying here. But I always felt guilty of spending their money. My parents told me not to worry about money
too much. They said that if I really felt very bad, I could treat their money as a loan, and pay it back to them in the future when I can earn money myself."

SK thought that her industry and effort was partly reflected by the good grades she received for her course work. "I had the intention of pursuing graduate studies. Good grades I got from the program right now would obviously be important for me to pursue my goal. So I was really concerned about what grades I would get, and I studied very hard to achieve good grades. To look back, I think I got overall good grades in my whole training process."

There were some unpleasant times during the training, particularly when she questioned her self-ability. "I did not know if I was doing a good job, or was able to do a good job." While reactions from others in the class could contribute to this feeling, SK felt that the feeling was mainly triggered by her own perception that she was not as competent as her fellow trainees. "Again, use the interviewing skill training class as an example. Everybody's counselling session was videotaped and shown in class for training purposes. I watched other people's sessions and compared them with the session I had done with my clients. I said to myself: 'you see, this person is doing a good job, but look at what you have done in your session; it is not going anywhere!' Nobody in the class actually said anything like that to me, but I was judging my own performance negatively."

As her studies proceeded, SK felt "a little bit better" in terms of participating more freely in the class activities and connecting with other colleagues in classes. "I forced myself to be more active in group learning circumstances. I think I never got the feeling that I was being refused by others in my training, and I generally felt I was welcome." But still, from time to time, SK could sense a feeling of "self-inadequacy" when working together with her
It was not like I was doing a bad job. But maybe my self-esteem and self-confidence were a bit low because of my perception on my English language ability. I never really felt comfortable with my English capacity. I could live here for ten years, but I don’t think I would ever feel comfortable with my English because it is not my mother-tongue. Compared to my situation in Camosun college, my communication skill in English had improved a lot when I was doing my counsellor training at UBC. But still, I was not a hundred percent comfortable. So, this was something that always put me down."

After obtaining her diploma in guidance studies in counselling psychology at UBC, SK worked as an international student advisor in a private language school in Victoria, working mainly with international students. "I did not function exactly like a counsellor. While my duty combined the aspects of giving guidance and advice, its main focus was on problem-solving instead of helping the students cope with emotional issues. I am sure that my counsellor training experiences from UBC had helped my work in general, and my interpersonal communication skill in particular. I found that counselling skills mingled naturally into my interaction with others; I became a better listener, and I communicated with others more skilfully and effectively. I have become more people-oriented, and gained more sensitivity in interpersonal relationships in the work place, and in my personal life. That is, not just 'how I feel', but rather, I would pay more attention to how others feel, and what they had to say."

To summarize her experience of being a counsellor trainee as a whole, SK thought that it was a very meaningful experience for her. "It was a rewarding experience, although it was not easy at times. Because it was challenging, I worked hard on it, and learn a lot
from it. Before doing that, I was not quite sure what I really wanted to do. But now I see my career direction pretty clearly. My first goal is to get into the Master's program in counselling psychology. But that's a big commitment which needs to be time-wise and money-wise. The diploma program was like an introduction to the Master's program. It helped me to think if this was something I really wanted to do. So, my training in the diploma program opened the door for my initial exploration in the field of counselling psychology. It definitely enhanced my career aspiration to become a competent counsellor. I really feel my time and energy invested in this learning experience was worthwhile; it not only facilitated and strengthened my personal growth, but also helped with my career planning and development."

**The Summary of YK's Story**

Demographics

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YK was born and grew up in the city of Osaka, Japan. The oldest child in the family, YK has a brother and a sister. She was 32 years of age at the time of this interview. Having completed all her training requirements, YK was finishing her graduating essay for
Beginning: Before Coming to Canada

YK received a Bachelor of Arts degree and a teacher's certificate from Osaka University for Foreign Studies in Japan, majoring in English with a focus on American culture. "I had been always interested in the subject of psychology since my junior high school years, but I did not get a chance to pursue it as my career. Foreign language was another personal interest to me."

After her graduation from the university in 1989, YK worked for a copy machine manufacturing company. "Because my major was in English, so I joined the international division in that company. My duty covered a range of activities such as reception of guests from other countries, translating business documents, planning and implementing product promotion in overseas markets, marketing, etc. Later, my seniority in the organization provided me with opportunities to supervise junior employees, and I found that very interesting." YK was also the editor of the company's internal English newspaper for its wholesalers and dealers all over the world. "I had an American colleague working with me on the newspaper. So she would do the proof reading before the paper was in press". This working environment raised YK's curiosity of learning more about experience of living in a foreign country.

YK always had the goal of "going back to school someday. "I had never thought of working in that company for a life-long career though I liked that job. Actually, it was the company's expectation too. Girls stay in the company until they get married." She "saved money" in order to support herself later. As her "interest in psychology was growing and
growing," YK decided to pursue studies abroad. "I realized I was more interested in psychological issues related to cross-cultural adjustment. Living abroad would enrich my experience to become a professional helper, for example, a counsellor, to help people from other countries to adjust their lives in Japan."

Another reason for YK’s decision to study abroad rather than attending a school in her home country was that "it was very unusual for Japanese to go back to school once they had entered the world of work." University students were mainly young graduates directly from high school. "I noticed that I was already very old compared to these current students, and at the time, I did not feel comfortable to study in such kind of environment."

YK prepared to implement her plan. She took the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). "I went to different places after work to gather information I needed. My favourite subjects were art therapy, music therapy, and counselling psychology."

YK’s new student career began at Ohio University (OU) in the fall of 1994. Everything went very well for her; she had enough funding to support her study, quickly made new friends and adapted to the living environment, and enjoyed her academic life. "Everything was so interesting, especially those psychology classes. I was very happy about the fact that I could study what I wanted."

After two years of hard work, YK obtained her second bachelor’s degree, i.e., a BA degree in psychology from OU in the spring of 1996.

Middle: Initial Adjustment

With her goal to combine clinical psychology and cross-cultural issues, YK enrolled in the Master’s program at UBC in late August of 1996. "Funding became a central
concern. My own savings left might be enough only for one more year, but not for two years." YK felt the pressure when her parents promised that they would provide her with the financial support she needed. "'This time,' I said to myself, 'I have to be a good student because they support me financially now.'"

The initial transition in Canada was not as smooth as she had expected. "Before I went to Ohio, I had prepared for everything psychologically. But this time, I thought: 'Okay, I have stayed in the States for two years. Canada is just the same kind of place. I don't need any kind of preparation'. So I was not well-prepared either psychologically or physically." She realized that she was unable to register in a required course as it was already full. Meanwhile, she was experiencing other "hassles" such as having difficulty in renting a place to live.

"I was very down during the summer. My father had just retired and he was having a hard time to adjust to his new life of retirement. I had paid a short visit to my family in Osaka before I came to UBC. I didn't feel very comfortable seeing my father's situation."

"The weather in Vancouver was not good. It was raining quite often from the fall. The basement I rented was pretty dark. When all these things came at the same time, I was having a hard time. I think I was depressed." Fortunately, YK had two Canadian roommates who were also students. "They were very nice, and we got along well." But to get connect to people on campus was not easy. "It could be that UBC is too big. I found it more difficult to make a circle of friends in this place."

**Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training**

Parallel to these distressful experiences and events, anxiety feelings escalated in YK's
academic life. A big hurdle was the language difficulty. "Some professors here were very worried about my speaking ability. If I had been in other programs, like in general psychology or social psychology, my English might have been OK. Because this was counselling psychology, the requirement for language competency was much higher." YK "tried hard" to enhance her speaking ability. She tried to avoid speaking her mother tongue, and to use English as much as she could in life. "That's why I haven't made many Japanese friends here. I was afraid of the fact that my speaking (in English) would not improve if I spoke too much Japanese."

Other cultural problems also affected YK's student life. "People here, or in the States too, tend to see the outside (of a person). To give people a good first impression is crucial. So, how good we present ourselves to others becomes very important. Modesty is a virtue for me. Unfortunately, I could be seriously disadvantaged if I applied the same value here."

Participating in experiential group activities was also challenging for YK. "I felt bad about doing such work in class. I did not want to bother other Canadian students, so I tried to join other international students if there was a group work requirement. I am better at this sort of work now, but still, I am not very comfortable with it."

YK also did not feel comfortable in some negative training contexts. "Some students in the diploma program were very eager to get into the Master program, and they focused more on competing with others. Some of them were not friendly to others, whom they might regard as their rivals. Especially, when they knew you were already a Master's student." YK found that fellow trainees at the Master's level were more approachable.
Class presentation was something that YK always had a hard time coping with. "After every presentation, I felt down, and was depressed, I did not feel my performance was satisfactory at all. I am still not totally comfortable with presentation work. I know I am not good at presentation even in Japanese." According to YK, presentation requirements in skill training labs, such as basic interviewing and clinic classes, were the "hardest part" for her. Similarly, class discussion was another challenging task. "In Japan, we don't confront professors. We (as students) don't make any comments which might offend the professor, or give an opinion differing from that of the professor. But here, professors welcomed viewpoints from students, and they really wanted to know what students were thinking about. So, they expected me to say something. It was very hard for me to do that. Nowadays I have become more comfortable to say something in the class. But still, I think I should say less and sit quietly in the class."

She regarded her experience in the clinical training class as a "suffering". "Unfortunately, my supervisor in the clinic did not have any cultural sensitivity. She was a sessional instructor who was very young, about my age, and seemed to lack experience in supervision. She sometimes made offensive comments: she didn't mean to, but they hurt a lot. These remarks made me lose confidence. I felt extremely difficult to validate myself in that environment. I had a hard time to finish that clinic."

Later, the negative impression was alleviated quite a bit when YK had the opportunity to join two other clinics supervised by faculty members of the department. "These two professors were apparently much more culturally sensitive. They focused more on validating students' growth in the training." YK felt that it would be facilitative to
trainees like her if instructors and supervisors could increase their awareness and basic knowledge concerning cross-cultural issues.

YK felt that there was a lack of interest in cross-cultural issues among her fellow trainees. "They were nice people. Maybe I was too demanding. The key fact was that they seemed to be lacking interest and experience in this domain, so they had a hard time to relate themselves to what trainees from another cultures have experienced."

There were good experiences. "I actually sometimes felt I liked to study here better because of some different new experience. For example, professors were very friendly and accessible. In Japan, you have very few opportunities to contact your professors."

The course on cross-cultural issues in counselling psychology was one of the learning experiences YK cherished. "The class had a big meaning to me. Before taking it, I struggled a lot in the training process because of different educational methods in the new system here. I attributed everything to myself, i.e., 'I'm not good at this or that'. In the cross-cultural class, I wrote papers, had in-depth discussions, and interviewed people from other cultures. Through this learning process, I came to realize that I should not totally take in or blame myself for difficulties in adjustment. I said to myself: 'wait a second, it may be just a cultural difference.' By looking at the issue with a new perspective, YK realized that she just had a learning style that was very different from the norms of the host cultural environment. "For example, I may not be so quick to respond spontaneously on the spot, but my style may be inclined to a more in-depth brainstorming that requires a bit longer internal analytical process. Before that (class), I had thought that my style was not great, and the general style people use here had to be better than mine." With this realization, YK
was able to recognize many other cultural differences in her training, and to live and cope with them more comfortably. "In my major paper for the course, I wrote about how to do counselling with people from Japanese cultural background. Instead of focusing on the Western-oriented concept of 'independent self', I explored the Eastern philosophy of 'interdependent self' and its applicability in counselling." The increase of self-awareness made YK feel more confident about her own culture. She saw the need to form and develop theoretical orientations that would reflect and meet the specific psychological needs of people with non-Western cultural backgrounds.

The counselling practicum course provided YK with a good opportunity to explore further in this direction. Her clients in the practicum site were Japanese students studying in Canada. "It was a very rewarding and positive experience for me. To work with Japanese students in Japanese, I thought I had to modify the existing counselling models, and make the helping approaches relevant to my clients' needs. That was actually the first time I enjoyed the role of being a counsellor."

Although family support could have been nice in her coping with difficulties in the host country culture, YK tried not to seek psychological help from this resource. "In my case, I didn't tell my family the difficulties I encountered here in my student life because I didn't want them to worry about me." Thus, support from professors and friends (including some colleagues) remained the main source of support for YK when she needed assistance.

Academic competence always had a lingering effect on how YK saw herself in the training process. Things such as receiving affirmative feedback from professors and
colleagues, obtaining good grades on assignments, and the like, were all very important for YK. "That's why I was feeling very good about myself when I was in Ohio. Likewise, when I got good grades for my work here, I felt I was validated; when the evaluation was positive, my self-confidence got boosted. That made me feel very good."

YK was finishing her graduating essay, the last requirement for obtaining her Master's degree. "I have learned about myself in the past two years more than I did in my entire life. I think that this feeling may be natural for those who have gone through their training in our program. I heard quite a few people say the same thing. It was sometimes very hard. But for me, it's a growing experience." The most influential legacy of the experience was the enhancement of her self-awareness. "I think that's helpful for me if I don't do counselling as my career. It's very good to know who I am." Also, having counselling skills would always be a plus in any interpersonal situation. "These skills would be transferable to many aspects in my future life and career. These gains through the training have helped, and will help me a lot. I feel I have got something from this program, definitely."

YK had some ambivalence about what she had experienced as a counsellor trainee from a non-Western culture. "I sometimes feel I should have done my graduate study in Japan, but not in Canada. My English level seemed not good enough (for me) to counsel in English. I felt I did not 'experience' more fully what I had expected to experience. I could see that my English level interfered my enhancement. Very often, I had to focus on my English rather than on my skills. I felt that strongly during the practicum: I was feeling much better when I was doing counselling in Japanese."
Likewise, her learning experience on the whole might have been more dynamic, thorough, relaxed, and congenial. "If that had been the case, I would have been more accurate about my own ability in counselling. But as it is now, when a competency-related issue arises in my training, I could not tell if it came from my counselling ability or, came from my English language proficiency. So I was not sure about what was what, and it was not good at all. It negatively affected my self-confidence of becoming a counsellor."

YK was open to future career possibilities. "I will be going back to Japan for my career development, that's for sure. I may continue to take some extra courses to refine and expand my counselling skills before I am more confident to work in the counselling field. I may start my work as a teacher in a school setting where I could naturally switch my work to the role of a counsellor eventually."

In reflecting on her experience of being an international student, especially a counsellor trainee in North America, YK was somewhat philosophical. "I had very positive experience in Ohio, and I enjoyed it a lot. But I have gained more substantial and deeper experience of being a counselling trainee here in this program. I mean, the experience I have gained here is very meaningful to me although I suffered a lot in going through that. Maybe, in the future, when I look back at this period of my life, it may become memorable to me because it really taught me a lot. If there had only been positive aspects, I would not have learned that much from this experience, and in turn, it would not be this meaningful to my growth."
CHAPTER 5: THE GENERAL NARRATIVE OF NWC COUNSELLOR TRAINEES

In the preceding chapter, eight individual stories were presented. Each story represents a verified life career experience of a counsellor trainee from a non-Western culture (NWC). While each narrative manifests a range of diverse and unique experiences, in this chapter I intend to present a general narrative that will synthesize the main aspects and/or key themes that have arisen from the experiences of these eight individuals. This general narrative describes and illustrates the particular experiences of those who were involved in the current study, and it may yield some generalizations to people in similar contexts.

A narrative itself does not represent a result or outcome, but rather, the plots and turning points it reveals and transpires through the narration process render meaningful descriptions. It is these descriptions that function as the means leading to explanations and interpretations of individuals' actions associated with objectives, aims, goals, and purposes. Such human intentions are the essence a narrative attempts to focus on, to explore, to comprehend, and to convey. That is, the narrative serves as the core of meaning making in people's lives. Our present narrative of NWC counsellor trainees' experiences is no exception, and its function echoes exactly the very same nature of meaning making that a human story has. In defining such a nature, Cochran (1997) identifies three key characteristics of a narrative:

First, a narrative provides a temporal organization, integrating a beginning, middle, and end into a whole. As lived, an end is a projection into the future (a goal, purpose, intended outcome). A middle is the means or present movement toward an end. A past contains the beginning... Second, a story is a synthetic structure that configures an indefinite expansion of elements and spheres of elements into a whole... Third, the plot
of a narrative carries a point. It is not a meaningless rambling toward an end, but an integration of implicit convictions about the kind of person one is, the way other people are, the way the world is, and how things work or something gets accomplished. (p.5-7)

According to Cochran (1997), a story begins with a conflict, problem, or disequilibrium that drives the development of the whole story; the middle comprises the efforts to resolve the conflicts and problems; and the end brings closure to what was originated in the beginning. Cochran (1997) further suggests that a positive end is a solution to a problem or a resolution to a conflict. However, if the outcome state is deemed to be negative, the end can be a resignation to a problem or a loss.

Parallel to Cochran's delineation of a narrative structure, this story encompasses the succession of life career experiences that NWC trainees have encountered, beginning with their desire for change and preparation for coming to Canada. The middle comprises their initial adjustment after coming to Canada, and their efforts in searching for a new career direction leading to the pursuit of counselling psychology. The narrative ends with their experiences and endeavours in engaging themselves in counsellor training. To understand the story, it is necessary to set the scene by providing the reader with some of the background features that appear to be important in making sense of the context in which the story will unfold.

For consistency, the terms "NWC trainees", "trainees", and "these individuals/people", are used interchangeably in the following narrative. They all mean the counsellor trainees who have participated in the current study unless specified otherwise.
Background

Individuals from non-Western cultures usually go through a challenging and striving life career journey before they finally embark on the career realm of counselling psychology, continuing their training effort to become a professional helper. To describe and perceive their experience in this process, it is conducive to take a look at several major characteristics that constitute the general context for NWC counsellor trainees to initiate this voyage. The main aspects of this general background include circumstances such as the level of education, a sense of personal interest and aspiration, and the scope of career experiences.

Level of Education

Degree Holders. NWC counsellor trainees in this study are individuals who have been well-educated before coming to Canada. They have come to Canada either for immigration or for the pursuit of undergraduate or graduate studies at Canadian universities. They usually hold at least one university degree from their home countries or abroad prior to their arrival in this country. While all have bachelor's degrees, some of them obtained second degrees or diplomas at undergraduate or graduate levels. For example, YK had a second BA degree; both MY and KM possessed their Masters degrees, and SD had a graduate diploma. Likewise, the Medical Doctor degree that GI acquired was equivalent to a graduate degree.

Intellectual Competence. The disciplines of their first degrees varied substantially, usually having no direct connection with the subject matter of psychology. There are a rich variety of trainees' first degrees, covering subject matter such as education, medicine,
business administration, industrial and production engineering, mechanical engineering, music and arts administration, sociology, and English Studies. Despite their lack of direct connection to psychology, the high level of education forms a vital foundation for these individuals' life career development in the new social cultural environment.

Their educational background serves, in one way or another, to facilitate later life career transition, especially their transition to the new life in Canada. Rather than providing a direct knowledge base for their later pursuit in counselling psychology, the diverse knowledge and skills they have gained from their first degrees may manifest transferable skills. That is, this previous knowledge base might be used as a general groundwork for increasing self-insight, academic preparation, social competence, and problem-solving skills, that are essential to their new efforts in counsellor training in Canada.

Receptiveness to the Student Career. Trainees have some general sense of being a student, and tend to be receptive to this lifestyle change partly due to their previous university learning experience. In other words, the experience seems to be a significant cornerstone upon which they may reconstruct their current academic life even though the learning context is very different in a Canadian university. Coming back to university, in this sense, does not really seem impossible, but rather a natural pathway to follow during a transition time in their personal lives. Also, their achievement and success as students helps them to boost their confidence in their skills to tackle the new field of study. In every case the trainees did not doubt their capacity to return to university and study a new discipline. They were not discouraged over such a career move, despite the obstacles and difficulties they were facing in other aspects of their life in Canada.
Personal Interest and Aspiration

Environmental and External Influences. For many NWC trainees, their decision to major in counsellor education was neither triggered by a spontaneous idea, nor the expression of an abrupt mood shift. The act of seeking academic and professional training in counselling psychology never happens without its particular external and sociocultural context. The NWC trainees’ experiences demonstrate that their life career planning in Canada, in which the decision to go for counsellor training is an important part, is always intertwined with external influences. This will be reflected in the forthcoming narrative explicitly and repeatedly. For example, KM’s effort to resume graduate studies in some other majors, especially in his original professional background of industrial engineering, was hampered by the environment. YK’s positive learning experience in psychology electives back in Japan strengthened her interest in the field. Also, the consideration of an environment that might be able to better accommodate her interest in cross-cultural studies had an impact on YK’s choice for coming to be involved in graduate training. Both JV and MY became more interested in a helping profession with their volunteer and work experiences in helping others. In the cases of SK and GI, the external influences were, at least in part, from the counselling professionals and other people they had consulted before making the decision to study counselling psychology.

Internal Desires and Interest. Many NWC trainees held a very strong interest in the topic of human psychology and social behaviour. For some trainees, this aspiration for the study of such a field became very explicit and was a part of their vocational intention before or during their years of study for the first degree. For example, YK, GI and JV all
considered seriously a psychology major before entering university, although they did not actualize the idea for various reasons. In SD’s case, reading about psychology was always a personal hobby, and studying counselling psychology was a clear intention. For BH, her interest in counselling grew with her career experience as a teacher and an educational administrator. She saw the necessity and meaningfulness of promoting and expanding counselling services in the education system in her home country, and as a result, she was determined to pursue this new career direction. As for others (SK, KM, and MY), the aspiration for, and interest in counselling psychology grew parallel to their living experiences in Canada, during their initial adjustment.

Whether it is a long-held ambition or a newly-developed interest, the desire to become engaged in counsellor training is critical as individuals make their career plans. Guided by this personal aspiration, the trainees become more self-motivated, purposeful, and attentive in their training. Also, they can become more philosophical, open-minded, and persistent when facing challenges.

Career Experiences

Experienced Professionals. Although there is considerable diversity in terms of the levels and length of their previous working experiences, many of the NWC trainees describe themselves as successful professionals in their own fields prior to their coming to Canada. For instance, in BH’s 15-year career in education, she was recognized by her colleagues and supervisors as an excellent high school teacher, and later, a competent and respected administrator. JV devoted 22 years in his worklife in Mexico. He started to assume top managerial functions in his early twenties when still a university student, and eventually
built a successful financial consulting business with a friend. With a similar length of working experience, SD established a very successful industrial consulting career for himself, and was well-connected with clients in many parts of the world. Both MY and KM had about 12 to 14 years of working experience in Hong Kong. She was a well-established administrator in a music art organization, while he was an engineer in electronic and computer manufacturing, and later a training officer in engineer re-training for the Hong Kong government. YK started to work part-time as a clerk at a bookstore when she was a university student. She later accumulated 5 years of experience working as a marketing and administrative officer at her company's international division in Japan.

GI was a very experienced and respected medical professional in Argentina. For more than 10 years, he worked as a physician, a specialist in rehabilitation, and finally, as the head of the rehabilitation centre in a large hospital. Unlike other participants who were fully or partially enjoying their career along the way, in his heart GI never enjoyed his career in medicine. However, this did not prevent him from attaining professional success in his medical career before he finally decided to voluntarily quit. Compared to the other participants, SK's worklife history was much shorter, but she did have a couple of years of successful teaching experience.

**Effects of Previous Careers.** The relationship between previous worklife experience and counsellor training is complex. There are at least two major features that can be examined. First, these individuals can be considered as high-achievers in their former careers. They all had a solid resume demonstrating good professional experience. Second, although their previous careers were not in the professional domain of counselling
psychology, some of the trainees had professional experiences such as being a teacher/education administrator (SK, BH), engineering trainer (KM), and medical doctor (GI), which might have had some indirect connection with guidance and education. For others however, their worklife experience (JV-Business and finance; SD-industrial engineering; MY-art administration/marketing; and YK-international affairs/ marketing), differed substantially from the profession of counselling psychology. For them, pursuing counsellor training meant starting a completely new career.

**Prologue**

The following three-part story follows a sequential order. It starts with NWC trainees’ desire to leave their previous lives in their home countries, and ends with the trainees’ engagement in their new career path of counselling psychology in Canada. Within each main part or stage of the story, several descriptive segments were organized to manifest and emphasize the common themes rising from these individuals’ experiences. Each theme segment provides information concerning a particular type of experience which is, in a very similar fashion, composed of numerous single events, sub-experiences, sub-themes, and the like. Such a progressive structure aims at aiding the reader to catch the main turns and shifts reflected in the general story. The headings and subheadings that are used in the telling of the story are described in the following chart:
The Flow of the General Narrative

Beginning: Before Coming to Canada
Yearning for Change in Life
Defining Options
Preparing for the Transition

Middle: Initial Adjustment
Adapting to Environment
Searching for Direction
Finding a New Career Path

Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training
Getting Started
Mastering the Language
Adjusting to the System
Coping with Learning Dynamics
Facing Other Concerns
Growing in the Process

While this sequential organization corresponds well to the general literary flow of a story, it does not attempt to delineate and characterize all individual experiences into strictly defined sub-stages or sub-time lines that always comply with a linear development. Events and experiences in people's life, which are the very sources and material in forming a story, can often occur simultaneously, interact with one another, and vary and change in different contexts with people of diverse characteristics. As such, an essential feature of a human narrative which is of particular note is the "interweaving" nature described by Young, Collin, and Valach (1996). These authors suggest that constructing and telling a human story is like weaving a carpet or drapery where story segments are very often intermingled with one another in the process. Such a nature will be reflected and echoed by the present descriptions in the following general narrative.
Beginning: Before Coming to Canada

The story starts when NWC trainees think about and take initiative to implement a significant change in their life career, that is, leave their previous lives in their home countries, come to Canada, and pursue either re-settlement/immigration or another new university student career. Typically, there is an internal yearning for change. The reasons and rationale for this yearning varies from individual to individual. Trainees define and search for options, one of which is the notion of going to study in a Canadian university, or immigrating to Canada with his or her family. Once the decision is made, trainees actualize their plans to come to Canada.

Yearning for Change in Life

Enjoying Career Success and Satisfaction. Trainees are well-educated professionals involved in a diversity of careers back in their home countries. Being actively engaged in a worklife that is closely associated with their previous academic training in undergraduate and graduate studies, trainees usually live a successful and productive worklife which provides them with a certain degree of satisfaction and psychological and/or financial reward. They have very good professional records and some of them excel in their careers. Most of them have for a period of time enjoyed what they were doing for living. The exception to the above observation was GI, who was pushed by others into his medicine career. GI never found his true heart in this career. Nonetheless, GI reported that through the years he did like some aspects of the profession, such as counselling and communicating with his rehabilitation patients on a personal basis.

For most trainees, their interest and pleasure in their earlier careers appears to last a long
time. For example, whether being a high level managerial staff in Ford and American Express, or the CEO of his own financial consulting firm, JV was inspired by his success, and tried hard to expand his career ambition in business. Likewise, SD was involved in managerial duties, and later switched to an industrial consulting business which he truly enjoyed. BH, KM, and MY all immersed themselves in professional lives that lasted for between 12 to 15 years. They took pride in their vocational advancement, and found great satisfaction with what they had achieved in their careers. Although YK did not regard her work in the international division of the Japanese company as her long term career objective, she enjoyed her 5-year work experience with the company. In SK’s case, she enjoyed her part-time teaching work with high school students even though the work experience was relatively short compared to those of the others.

In addition to financial benefits, the trainees derive their sense of enjoyment from their worklives for a range of psychological reasons. These reasons include extending personal potential, striving for further accomplishment, helping and educating other people, and learning new things for self-enrichment. These reasons seem to form the framework that maintains the trainees’ desire in their on-going career pursuit. By the same token, these reasons become the driving force that calls for change when trainees plan the next big move in their life career path.

Seeking New Things in Life. Trainees seem to aspire for change at a certain point in their life career voyage, although the yearning for change may be triggered by different causes and purposes, expressed in different periods or phases of their lives, and presented in different ways. A common characteristic shared by trainees was their realization of the
need to pursue something new in life, i.e., something that can lead to a substantial transformation to a new environment, a new lifestyle, and presumably, a new career terrain. No matter what their personal circumstances, the yearning for change was not an aimless and unconscious behaviour but rather a deliberate and purposeful action. To this extent, the individuals in this narrative are the developers who initiate the transformation project in the first place even though the change process may become much more dynamic and unpredictable than what was originally anticipated.

For some, the yearning for change, or to put it more precisely, the wish to pursue a student career or immigration to Canada, is a part of *a long-term personal plan*. SK was considering seriously her next career move when she was still doing her undergraduate studies in Japan.

"For a few years I was thinking about what I really wanted to do. My desire seemed vague, and I was unsure about the exact direction I would go for. But one thing I was sure about was that I would like to do something different, something interesting. My saving money might be an unconscious behaviour to prepare for what I would do."

Likewise, because of her strong interest in the subject of psychology, YK was determined when still a student of Osaka University of Foreign Studies that she "would go back to school someday". Although enjoying her work, YK used her 5-year work experience as a preparation period for her goal of coming back to university later, particularly by saving part of her income to back up her plan financially. In BH’s case, she made three attempts in 8 years, aimed at a scholarship which would fund her further studies. SD appeared to have a clear long term preference to move to North America. He knew well in advance where he and his family would be heading. He had spent years making his final choice.

For others, the desire for change emerges and grows along with the development of
their life career. At a specific point in time, some trainees start to feel the need to reexamine what they have been going through, reflect on how they truly feel about these experiences, and search for new directions. While enjoying the success and comfort their careers have brought to them, they can feel a growing sense of dissatisfaction toward their present careers. For example, JV's deep soul-searching led him to question the real meaning of life and the value of power, prestige, and material prosperity. He realized that a quest for a new and different lifestyle would support his needs for self-understanding and self-fulfilment. Some trainees encounter similar experiences after a fairly long period of time and a substantial amount of effort invested in their careers. KM at the vocational training council, and MY with the orchestra, found that they were professionally well-established, financially better-off, yet personally not as satisfied as they used to feel about the worklife they were living. For KM, the personal inspiration for change in life was also echoed by both his wife and his intention of "getting a chance to learn more about the outside world". It appeared that GI's interest in changing his status quo and rebuilding a new life in Canada was first generated by his concern about his children's welfare. It was also fuelled by his chronic unhappiness with his medical career. The longing for change had always been with him, though it only became realized when he felt that he was ready to accept the truth of "breaking down the mask" he had been wearing for so long.

The common phenomenon for trainees is that they are agents who aspire for change in their life career development, and they are actors who make change happen. They are not passive, but active; they are not easily gratified by what they have accomplished (both tangibly and psychologically), but inspired to strive for a higher degree of fulfilment; they
are not unconscious, but intentional in the decision-making process. Rather than maintaining the status quo, these individuals are willing to assume the responsibilities and challenges of a voluntary transition. In summary, trainees choose to do what they are going to do next in their life career, that is, make a deliberate choice to come to Canada, starting a new life as either an international student or a new immigrant. Coming to Canada, in this sense, is the result of their internal calling for personal growth, and an expression of their willingness and effort for further development in their life career journey.

**Defining Options**

As the desire for change surfaces, trainees begin to question their future. They try to clarify what is really going on in their mind, and find options that will implement what they want to do. Defining and searching for options tends to be a dynamic process heavily influenced by the environment in which their life career experience is taking place. Regardless of the voluntary nature of the calling for change, each trainee always appraises and projects his or her initiatives with respect to the circumstances that he or she is in at the time. The process of finding an appealing alternative does not happen in a vacuum, rather, it is always intertwined with various sociocultural, economic, environmental and personal factors that form the context for the process to occur and proceed.

**The Sociocultural Context.** The general social and cultural environment a trainee has been experiencing may precipitate his or her desire to go for the preferred change. Gl was deeply concerned about his children's well-being because of the unfavourable social and economic situation in his home country at the time. Also, his wife was a Canadian citizen. These external factors became very influential in his consideration to immigrate to Canada.
KM appeared to be affected by the general tide of Hong Kong residents attempting to immigrate to Western countries in the middle of 1990s, although the fear of possible oppression after Hong Kong returning to Mainland China was not his main concern. The social context KM was facing seemed to have provided him with a kind of "fuse" that supported his desire for change. MY’s decision to immigrate to Canada was made within the same general social context as KM. The impact of turbulence or uncertainty in the society undoubtedly contributed to some of the decisions that were made.

YK was certainly not under the same type of circumstances as KM and MY. The context that encouraged her to study abroad was the particular cultural atmosphere she was experiencing. The unwritten social norm of "working adults seldom going back to school again" had an obvious impact on her decision to come to study in the United States and then in Canada. Likewise, the traditional life path for many Japanese women did not fit with SK’s desire for her own life planning. This context seemed to have fostered her incentive to go abroad, and to explore something different and new. On the other hand, the sociocultural context can also yield facilitative environment for a trainee’s choice to study abroad. For instance, although the competition was fierce, the Commonwealth scholarship provided BH with a viable alternative that was vital in her attempt to study in Canada.

Personal Context. Some trainees’ knowledge and experiences, especially those associated with their professional lives, and those concerning living abroad, tended to shape their personal context, stimulating and nurturing their interest in living or studying in Canada. There was no doubt that YK’s 5-year working experience in the field of international affairs and marketing broadened the scope of her original interest, and she
came to the realization that she "was more interested in psychological issues related to cross-cultural adjustment". SD’s extensive living and travelling experiences abroad had a strong impact on his decision to immigrate to Canada. In BH’s situation, she had never lived abroad. However, her career as a teacher and educational administrator was cultivating her desire to pursue the option of graduate counsellor training in a Western country. As she put it,

"counselling was really not a pronounced priority in my country. But the longer I worked in my area, the more importance I saw concerning counselling, and the more interest I grew toward counselling profession."

Likewise for JV the fact he did not have direct experience of living in another country did not prevent him from defining certain choices. His final decision to come to Canada was affected in part by the context of the relatively closer geographic distance between his home country of Mexico and the host country of Canada.

Trainees vary in terms of their main purposes for coming to Canada. Under the two banners of attending university or resettling in this new country, many trainees seem to have personal reasons and expectations toward their new student or immigrant lives in Canada. These expectations naturally come into play as trainees define their choices. Satisfying a sense of curiosity and fascination about English, psychology, and cross-cultural experience seemed to be significant when SK and YK were clarifying their plans. With an interest in cross-cultural issues and in the helping profession, BH concentrated more on her objective of getting a graduate degree. Enjoying the idea of "learning another culture, another language, and new things in another country", JV formulated a plan to use a couple of years to find out his inner calling for life and career. For him, immigration to Canada would
serve as a "retreat" for the purpose of charting a new career direction. JV’s intention was shared and echoed, to a certain extent, by KM, MY, GI, and SD in their rationale for coming to Canada.

Family Influence. A commonly shared phenomenon among many trainees in their career search is that when they are weighing their options, they take into serious consideration the possible pros and cons that the event can have on family members. This appears to be particularly true for trainees who are older in age, and married with children. For example, in considering their alternatives, BH, GI, JV, KM, SD and MY all included their family members as an important part of their planning for the move. Their spouses and/or children were key parties involved in the entire decision-making process. This level of "family importance" may decrease if trainees are relatively young in age, and are not married and/or have children. This was reflected in the decision making processes of SK and YK. These younger and unmarried trainees tended to have more freedom in their career planning.

Preparing for the Transition

As the option of going abroad becomes more clear and certain, trainees begin to take actions to implement their plan to live in North America. All the trainees, regardless of their previous experiences of living abroad, came to Canada directly from their home countries with the exception of YK who had spent two years as an international student in the United States before coming to Canada for her graduate studies in counselling psychology. As the basic cultural contexts in both Canada and the US can be categorized into the general domain of Western Culture within the North America geographic area, it
can be assumed that YK’s preparation for, and adjustment to, her new student life in Ohio was comparable to the experiences of the other trainees. This preparation usually involves a series of efforts and actions blending both psychological and tangible functioning. The preparation is purposeful and goal-oriented as trainees have the time and space to plan what they are going to do next. Because of the agent role trainees assume, they are active in planning and implementing each step toward their goals.

**Gathering Information.** An essential task for preparation is to get more knowledge about the host country. Trainees try to collect as much information as they can under the circumstance so that they can become more familiar with the sociocultural, economic, environmental, and other related factors in the host country. This type of preparation involves psychological preparation. KM’s and GI’s direct communication with the Canadian government agencies in Ottawa and in Hong Kong was an apparent attempt for this purpose. By the same token, YK expended considerable effort in gathering information available in her home town concerning universities in Canada and the United States. Another way for information gathering is through informal channels such as talking to different people concerning how life might be in the host country. A majority of the trainees sought opinions from their relatives, friends, acquaintances, and mentors who had more comprehensive knowledge and/or direct experiences about living in North America. For example, BH, GI, KM, MY, and SK all made such an effort depending on their needs. JV’s method of collecting information was quite different from those of the others. The three special preparation trips he made to Vancouver not only aimed at setting up practical arrangements for the whole family to move here later, but also provided him with opportunities to get to
know the place better. The experience of SD did not correspond to this general pattern because of his prior knowledge of the host country.

To make oneself more informed about the situation one is going into goes beyond the simple expectation of accumulating knowledge about the host country. The central intention is to increase one's awareness and capacity for envisioning the possible pros and cons that might emerge in the journey ahead. This effort aims at aiding trainees to be prepared for the possible coming events, especially for potential difficulty. For example, GI, KM, and MY were prepared for the "worst case scenario", though the degree of their psychological preparation varied. YK weighed the pros and cons carefully with regard to choosing a more appropriate university that would benefit her needs. JV processed his first-hand observations, and came to the conclusion that moving to Vancouver was a good alternative. SK, however, thought that she had not been psychologically well-prepared when she was anticipating what was going to happen. Her excitement about studying in Canada may have resulted in her underestimation of the possible difficulties that lay ahead.

Another major aspect characterizing trainees' actions related to their *tangible preparation* for the transition event. Making sure that there are reasonable financial resources available seems to be a key component in this part of the preparation process. Trainees with a relatively short work history, such as SK and YK, saved a considerable amount of their income for this purpose. Trainees who had a relatively long vocational history, as in the cases of KM and MY, tended to have even more sustainable and adequate financial resources. For trainees who were affluent, like JV and SD, very little attention was given to raising funds for their lives abroad. Money for living was simply not a central
concern on their agenda. Without personal financial resources available, BH was determined to obtain the Commonwealth Scholarship as the pre-condition for coming to study abroad.

For GI, it was virtually impossible for him to allocate extra funds for financial planning for his immigrant life in Canada. The financial preparation he could make was extremely restricted by his specific context. The best he could do was to sell all his assets back in his home country, and bring the meagre amount, which was only enough to support his family in Canada for a couple of months, with him when immigrating to Canada.

With respect to other aspects of tangible preparation, trainees are all proactive to implement their plans. They are aware of the fact that they themselves need to take the initiative in order to make things happen. As a result, they are all actively involved in each action that will lead them to realize their objectives of studying or resettling in the host country. These actions include taking required tests such as the TOEFL and completing application procedures for university admission or immigration. Also, they usually make pre-arrangement before they come to the host country so that they will have at least a temporary place to live in before any long term planning is going to be made. Trainees coming with international students status, as in the situations of BH, SK, and YK, often made such arrangement through relevant services on campus, e.g., campus housing and the host family program. Trainees who came as new immigrants, on the other hand, would usually turn to their relatives and friends for similar assistance. It is evident that trainees with affluent private financial resources have an advantage when making their plans for the host country. For example, through a friend, SD rented a furnished apartment before his family's arrival in Vancouver. JV was able to make 3 special trips to Vancouver beforehand
as part of his preparation. He set up a business office for himself, rented a house for his family, and made other necessary arrangements for the family to move to Canada as smoothly as possible.

**Middle: Initial Adjustment**

The middle part of the story describes trainees’ initial adjustment experience after coming to Canada. Trainees start to encounter new situations that call for adaptation to life in the host country. Individual experiences vary significantly. For instance, the length of time required for adjustment may be different, and individuals’ perceptions and reactions on supposedly similar situations can be diverse as well. Trainees have to cope with a series of new issues emerging in this process. Once feeling more settled, many trainees begin to search for direction that will lead them to explore potential career alternatives in the host country. While some trainees are aware of their career goal of going into counsellor training, many arrive at the decision on pursuing this career path through self-exploration and reality-checks. No matter how long this period lasts, it serves as a key junction or bridge to meaningfully connect the beginning (i.e., past life episodes) and the end (i.e., future life episodes), thereby ending the most critical part of the story. The middle is completed with actions to engage in the pursuit of the new career plan, embarking on the goal of becoming a counsellor trainee in Canada.

**Adapting to Environment**

The initial life transformation that unfolds in a totally new sociocultural environment manifests a colourful, exciting, diverse, complex, yet very often distressful experience for individuals. Trainees’ experiences in this period vary substantially, although they also share
some similar experiences.

Settling down physically in the new place seems to be important for providing trainees with an initial sense of stability and comfort. Very often, for trainees who have substantial financial resources, this part of the adjustment comes much easier than for trainees who are financially more disadvantaged. JV and SD were having a relaxed time during this initial period of transition. For them, the initial coping issues such as getting to know the place, and improving language skill (in JV's case), were relatively minor adjustment issues, but not "survival-threatening" challenges. BH's good experience associated with her host family and the university housing services facilitated her sense of smooth transition to settle down in the new environment. Not every trainee will have a smooth ride at the onset of this adjustment. Various difficulties surface in this regard. SK was experiencing negative feelings with her first host family, and this experience soon overshadowed her initial excitement about student life in Canada. YK was having a hard time to find an appropriate place to live when she first arrived in Vancouver. KM was experiencing anxiety when his family was living under the same roof with a relative's family. GI was forced into leaving his relative's house by the landlord and his family was experiencing financial hardship.

Financial Concerns. An essential factor that can either facilitate or hinder the adjustment process, especially in the beginning period of people's arrival in Canada, is the availability of financial resources. A few of the trainees did not have financial concerns, as in the situations of JV, KM, and SD. A majority of the other trainees prepared to support themselves financially to some degree so that they could be at least self-reliant for a period
of time but financial security was still a serious concern. For example, MY reported that her and her husband’s effort in finding employment at this initial period was mainly to assure and strengthen the sense of financial security. Although with adequate financial support from her scholarship, what worried BH most was how to save a little bit here and there so that she could send some money back to support her family (her husband was laid off from his work). Although financial concern was not an issue during YK’s two-year study in psychology at Ohio University in the States, it became a big concern at the time she came for her graduate study in Canada. She knew that she was going to get financial support from her parents, a situation that she had wished not to happen as she didn’t feel comfortable using her parents’ money after being financially self-reliant for a long time.

Furthermore, it can be readily imagined that for trainees with few financial resources, the issue goes way beyond the normal level of "concern"; it becomes a central determinant that burdens one’s psychological and physical well-being. Frequently, it is the primary cause for other feelings of anguish and shame. This was the case for GI when he had to get help from the social assistance system.

Language Issue. Language barriers emerge as a large issue with a majority of the trainees. All the trainees had at least some basic English language ability due to their previous education, although their capacity to use English varied substantially. For trainees who do not use English as a main tool in their daily communication back in their home countries, as in the cases of GI, JV and SK, experiencing predicaments in this regard is something that is understandable. However, for trainees who have higher level of English competency, language barriers can often still be a roadblock to their general adjustment in
Canada. An illustration is the experiences of BH and KM, both of whom came from former British colonies where English was the official language. BH and KM reported that among other things, the two stumbling blocks were the accent they had when speaking English, as well as their lack of knowledge of the "Canadian context" when the English language was being utilized in everyday life. There are exceptions in this respect. For example, SD indicated that using English language was not a problem for him, while MY and YK didn't specify that they were experiencing language difficulties in their daily lives during the initial transition period. This may suggest that trainees who have extensive previous educational and living experiences in an English-speaking Western country such as the UK and the USA, can possess, among other things, more competence in using English. Thus, they can be more advantaged in the early adjustment process in terms of dealing with language-associated barriers in their daily routine.

Social Relationships. Experiencing a sense of social isolation is a fairly common phenomenon among many trainees. This sense of isolation is a natural reflection of the particular circumstance trainees are in at the time. Once they come to Canada, they lose direct connectedness with their previous social circles such as loved ones (e.g., parents), close relatives, friends, and colleagues. It appears that having some relatives or close friends already living in Canada may help to ease the sense of loneliness and isolation. As indicated by KM, MY, and SK, the consequent relief for the sense of isolation would come only when they were able to build new social circles, such as having made new friends in Canada, i.e., having not only friends of their own ethnic background, but friends from mainstream culture in the Canadian context. While many trainees experienced intense and
lengthy feelings of alienation and loneliness, JV and SD did not report having had difficulties or experiencing these type of feelings. They might be in a better position, partly because of factors such as financial resources, and previous experiences living abroad.

**Personal Circumstances.** Other varied and unique personal circumstances may also affect moods, thoughts, and behaviours during this initial period of transition. Again, these personal factors and situations can be either facilitative or obstructive to a trainee’s adjustment. Apparently, JV’s purpose in "enjoying life in Canada, and thinking what to do next" seemed to have set up a very positive tone for his adjustment. SD’s similar intention was also working well for his smooth adaption to the new environment. However, KM was experiencing emotional "ups and downs" because of the sudden change of his lifestyle. In addition to coping with various adjustment requirements in the external environment, the increase of domestic workload such as parenting and taking care of household chores created quite an undesirable stir in his life. YK seemed to have been affected somewhat by her family re-union experience before coming to Canada, especially that of her father’s adjustment difficulties during retirement. This reality added to her initial unpleasant experiences in Canada. The lack of familiarity with the basic cultural norms such as how to approach people, how to get used to the individualistic way of life, and the like, tended to be the main adjustment roadblock for BH in this new environment.

**Searching for Direction**

**Assessing Objectives.** During the initial adjustment trainees were *intentional in their endeavour* to search for life career directions. A few trainees who had a confirmed career goal and had explicitly committed themselves to the goal, such as coming to Canada for the
sole purpose of pursuing a graduate degree in counselling psychology, did not engage in this process during the initial adjustment phase. Rather, they went through the process before coming to Canada. For example, both BH and YK did considerable "homework" in deciding their next career move, and they knew well in advance that they were directly going into counsellor training once they landed on Canadian soil.

This situation does not apply to many other trainees, of whom the majority come to Canada as new immigrants. Many in this group are undecided in terms of finding a more optimal alternative in their new life career construction. Trainees in this category usually encounter a substantial transitional experience during which they cope with new challenges and situations, clarify personal motives, assess external conditions, and engage in an active search for an optimal yet obtainable career direction. Along with their general life adjustment in Canada, this search for a new career path can last for at least a couple of years. For example, GI, JV, KM, MY, and SK all went through this critical period of time, a time of experiencing general life challenges, attempting vocational trials, pondering what they have encountered, seeking new directions, and acting on new initiatives as a result of their interaction with the new sociocultural environment as well as their increasing self-awareness.

Initiating Worklife. Trainees do not passively wait for things to happen to them, but rather, they take action. The experience of acting upon ideas and plans may often mean a "rough-ride" in a new and unknown country. One such action is to seek immediate employment so that they can re-establish themselves at least in a tentative occupation during the transition period. The underlying agenda for this effort varies substantially, while the
overt behaviour of involving oneself in worklife seems similar. JV's continuing engagement in the financial consulting business was for the purpose of eventually disengaging himself from the profession so that he could give himself some space and time for more in-depth career exploration and planning. Although in a very similar situation, SD had a somewhat different intention; he wanted to retain his business practice while spending some time in pursuing options for counsellor training, the new career direction he had set for himself when coming to Canada.

For many other trainees, seeking employment is really their priority in this period because it directly affects the financial survival for themselves as well as for their families. A job is urgently needed in order to make a living. This sense of urgency was reflected by MY's feeling that getting a job was the key to getting adjusted to other areas of life. "Having a job gives you at least a sense of security financially, and then you would have a better mood to learn the place, the people, and many other new things..." Her feelings and perspectives on the issue were perhaps echoed most strongly by how GI experienced and felt about the whole matter. KM had less of a sense of urgency in this regard. Despite the fact that the attainment of his first job in Canada was easy and smooth, his relatively sufficient financial resources provided him with more comfort and security.

A common reality for new immigrants, is under-employment, e.g., lower their previous vocational prestige level, lower expectations on financial gains and benefits, or totally giving up their previous career. MY's temporary part-time job as well as her later self-employment as a small store owner exemplifies this common phenomenon. From an experienced physician and rehabilitation specialist to a temporary rehabilitation aide, and
then to a carpenter assistant, GI’s employment experiences also reflect this process. Parallel to these experiences of under-employment, KM’s job as a computer robot technician in the assembly line was a substantial down-grade from his previous positions as a senior computer engineer and technical training officer. Like MY, KM later had to depart from his past professional background totally, and to become a self-employed driving instructor.

Trainees understand that it is important for them to grab the jobs that are available since they need to make a living. They hope that in time they will be able to move beyond these survival jobs. They basically accept reality, and hope for a better future. In maintaining their temporary employment such as a woodwork helper, driving-instructor, or clothing store owner, GI, KM, and MY were busy investigating a more optimal route for their long-term career development. Their tolerable attitude toward the status quo of their worklife did not prevent them from being engaged in the endeavour of rebuilding a career in Canada. Among other things, collecting information, seeking others’ opinions, trying to regain previous professional status, and most of all, self-exploration, were just some of the main features reflecting this longer term perspective.

Finding a New Career Path

Forming a Direction. As the journey of career search proceeds, a direction for a meaningful vocational pursuit emerges. For some trainees, such as BH, SD, and YK, their objective of taking graduate degree studies in counselling psychology was at least generally confirmed before coming to Canada, even though the experiences and contexts related to this confirmation could vary. For others, the decision to position themselves in a brand new career territory, i.e., to become a professional helper through counsellor training, manifests
a significant turning point regarding life career adjustment in the host country. It is not a simple step to take. For example, GI had been a physician and rehabilitation specialist; JV had been a CEO in financial consulting business; KM had been an engineer and technical trainer; MY had been an art administrator; SD had been an industrial consultant, and SK had been a part-time teacher and a student. None of the trainees had been directly involved in the counselling field prior to coming to Canada.

Making a Decision. Before entering into this new field, many trainees have little knowledge about the profession. In the cases of GI, JV, KM, MY, and SK, the career choice of going into counsellor training was the result of their active endeavour in searching for a more appropriate vocational direction during their initial period (the first couple of years) in Canada. This period of life experience appears to be very critical in triggering and shaping their decision to pursue counsellor education and counselling psychology. Several factors appear to have an impact on the decision-making process.

First, there is an internal development of self-awareness and self-understanding. Trainees are proactive travellers in their journey for self-exploration. They have a strong desire to find a vocational direction that really means something to them; it is a vocation, from which they can feel a sense of meaning, and upon which they can devote their heart. No matter how diverse their previous personal life and worklife histories, trainees find themselves seriously contemplating their vocational calling. Very often the goals are not that clear, and it takes time to think, to reflect, to analyze, and to act. For example, MY gradually realized that she had a strong desire to help people. JV found a very similar intention about his interests. While GI’s intention was at least in part parallel to that of
MY's and JV's, he was determined not to enter a professional field that would be associated with medicine. KM's growing interest was determined partly by his desire for self-directed learning, and his fascination about readings on topics of selfhood.

Second, there is an influence from trainees' initial living and working experiences in the host country. This phenomenon tends to be particularly relevant to trainees who are new immigrants. For various personal, financial, or other reasons, these trainees start their vocational trials in a diversity of paid and volunteer work. Work experiences as such can have a significant impact on trainees' formation of their career goals. A common prospect is that through these work experiences, trainees become more aware of their talent in connecting with people, their intention in working with people, and their natural propensity for the helping profession. JV's volunteer tutoring experience with people of special needs, KM's experience as a driving instructor, and MY's experience as the owner of the clothing store, were all good illustrations in this regard.

Some difficulties were encountered in the initial adjustment period, especially regarding social barriers. KM's initial intention, for instance, was to either continue his previous profession in engineering, or pursue a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, both of which would build on or utilize his previous academic and professional knowledge. However, his various efforts were hampered by the fact that his previous credentials from Hong Kong were not recognized in Canada. To some extent, the social reality circumscribed KM's choice, and he had to be more flexible to seek other options, among which counselling psychology emerged as a natural alternative given his circumstances. In GI's case, he was purposeful in his endeavour of going back to university,
an act partly aimed at changing the stereotypical negative views some people have toward immigrants from Latin America.

Third, there is an influence from significant others. In searching for a career direction, trainees are often affected by the viewpoints, suggestions, or deeds of other individuals whom trainees connect or associate with in this initial period of adjustment and transition. KM had been impressed by the work of his counsellor friend back in Hong Kong, and he became more attracted to the topic of counselling psychology after his wife enrolled in the doctoral level training in the field. Both GI and SK were influenced not only by their counsellors, but by other people, e.g., mentors and friends. YK’s decision to pursue counsellor training in Canada was partly influenced by one of her colleagues’ views concerning the learning context. For these and other trainees, understanding and support from their families at the time were influential. The support could be in the form of financial and tangible aid, or in the form of psychological encouragement.

In addition to these influential factors, a common aspect shared by all the trainees is a sense of personal drive. Even though there may be various individual difficulties and environmental hinderances along the way, trainees take the ownership of their life career exploration; they are highly motivated, take initiative, fulfil responsibilities, and carry out action plans. In other words, they are vigorous actors who make things happen. For example, they were proactive in gathering relevant information concerning academic programs they might consider pursuing; they listened to others’ advice; they compared and analyzed the available information in order to come up with a more appropriate option. Once they were sure which direction to go, they implemented their plans by taking concrete
actions toward their new career objectives, an opportunity and challenge that, for many of them, would take them down a new career path with many unknowns. With a strong sense of agency, these individuals acted on the goals they had formed for themselves, and they tenaciously pursued their objectives. As a result, their intent to engage in their new career trial, i.e., to pursue counsellor training and to become a professional helper, became a reality.

Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training

This last part of the story serves as an appropriate ending due to the fact that becoming a counsellor trainee represents a closure to the problems that emerged in the beginning (e.g., desire for change) and efforts to deal with the problems in the middle (e.g., search for new career options). According to Cochran (1997), no matter whether this part of the story yields a positive end such as a solution to a problem, or a negative end such as the resignation to a problem or a loss, it represents the completion of a sequence of events and a course of actions that form this particular story. With this principle in mind, this last section attempts to reflect NWC counsellor trainees' experiences as the story proceeds to reach its climax. Similar to the previous episodes, the last segment also comprises a series of events and developments, fitting to the temporal nature of a story line.

Getting Started

Preparing for a Long Commitment. To pursue the professional training in counselling psychology requires commitment. The first demand is psychological readiness for a lengthy training period. This means that trainees have to devote extra time and effort to this process. Trainees are quite aware of this time requirement, and show their
willingness to accept the new reality. For many, enrolling in basic undergraduate courses is a common way to begin their journey in the helping profession.

**Aiming at Graduate Studies.** Virtually every trainee had the intention to proceed toward graduate level counsellor training, yet the majority of trainees were not able to achieve the goal immediately due to their lack of counselling-related background knowledge. As a way to gain credentials and build their qualification, many trainees enrol into the guidance diploma program in counselling psychology before they are accepted into the Master’s program. Some of them, such as JV and SD, spent a longer time in this process as they finished the guidance diploma prior to their official entrance into the graduate program. Others are able to save a bit more time given their successful admissions to the Master’s program before their completion of all the course requirements for the guidance diploma. Trainees like GI, MY and KM went through this faster track to the graduate level training.

Trainees with related academic and professional experiences have a considerable advantage in this regard. BH’s B.Ed. degree and her extensive work experience as a school teacher and administrator in education maximized her chance to be one of the few candidates for graduate studies without an intensive period of "qualifying study". YK’s 3-year study period in the U.S., particularly her second psychology degree earned during this period of time, consolidated her status to be a solid candidate for the Master’s program. Although trainees such as BH and YK did not have to spend several semesters of extra time to up-grade their credentials, they later realized that they still needed to take some extra supplementary courses. They encountered a heavier workload and a longer period of study
to finish their Master's degree program.

Mastering the Language

Individualized Experience. It is apparent that language barriers, again, become one of the key issues in trainees' life career development. To learn and utilize a second language in the host country environment is a daunting task for one to manage in daily life. To use English in a language-intensive professional training such as counselling psychology can entail even greater complications for individuals whose mother tongue is not English. Many trainees have acquired some level of English language competency by the time they start their counsellor training. A majority of the trainees may be considered fairly capable English users. Some have used English frequently in their home countries, such as in the cases of BH, and KM; others have had the opportunities of living and studying in England or North America, like SD and SK. Still, other trainees, YK and MY, have obtained a combination of both of these experiences.

Trainees with a background in English are supposed to have some advantage with respect to their language capacity. However, the reality seems to only partly support such a scenario. The previously-learned English skill can be of assistance to some trainees, but not to others who are supposed to be in the category of "more skilful English users". The reported difficulties in using English in training vary from person to person. The magnitude and intensity of language difficulty appears to be dependent on individual experiences and perceptions. SD and MY did not encounter substantial barriers in using verbal English during their training. Their proficiency in English, especially their previous student life experiences in England and the USA might be a facilitative factor. But this is by no means
common to everybody with similar background experiences. Even though YK had been a psychology student for years in the United States, and had a relatively long personal history in using English, YK indicated that she had significant language difficulties.

Many other trainees reported varied levels of difficulties in the oral communication part of the training program. Among these trainees, individuals such as BH and KM had lived and worked in their home towns where English was an official language. Still, factors such as speaking accent and limited vocabulary hindered their capacity for oral communication. SK’s two-year student life in Canada before becoming a counsellor trainee helped with the development of her oral communication skills. Nonetheless, she could still feel the language difficulty from time to time in her training. Trainees who lack previously-learned English skills, such as in the cases of JV and GI, faced even more hinderance caused by the language barrier. For them, to acquire and increase English language capacity became the number one priority in their training. As GI put it, trainees like him virtually had to learn the language skill "from the very basic level".

Extra Effort. It is no surprise that many trainees spend extra time and effort to improve their English while managing to carry on other undertakings required by the training program. For them, the acquisition of professional knowledge and skills in counselling goes hand-in-hand with the enhancement of their language capacity in English, a parallel learning process. As time goes by, trainees usually find that their language ability improves, and they feel more skilful and comfortable in utilizing English in the training process. For example, KM, GI, and SK all reported that the longer they studied in a higher education context, i.e., college and university level courses and programs, the more
competent they felt about their proficiency in English. The development of their language capacity facilitated their learning and training in counsellor education.

Although this seems to be a general phenomenon, it does not necessarily reflect how every trainee feels about the issue. An example of such was YK’s experience. She appeared to have experienced more language-related obstacles than the other trainees. At the end of her program, she was still feeling inadequate in oral communication. This inadequacy had a negative impact on her learning experience as a counsellor trainee. By the end of the training program, YK found it very difficult to assess her real professional progress due to the fact that it was hard to tell "whether it is a language problem or a skill problem".

Adjusting to the System

Entering a Dual-transition. Enhancing English proficiency remains a daunting task for many trainees, especially during the initial period of their training. Nonetheless, this exemplifies only one of the major demanding undertakings they confront. The adjustment to their new student career in counsellor education encompasses a series of challenging experiences. Such experiences manifest a mix of characteristics reflected by both cross-cultural coping and adult transition to higher education. NWC trainees assume a dual-role once they enter the university to pursue counsellor training. They are individuals from non-Western cultures who are going through a very unique acculturation process. On the one hand, they are people in cross-cultural transition. On the other hand, most of the trainees are adult learners with rich working experiences. They have built very successful careers before coming back into higher education. Under these circumstances, they may encounter some similar experiences to adult returning students in the main-stream culture. In this
respect, they are also adult learners facing back-to-school transition.

**Shouldering the New Student Role.** To re-familiarize oneself with a student life style that he or she has left behind for 15 to 25 years is a very demanding task. Difficulties can be compounded given the fact that this adjustment process takes place in a totally new sociocultural environment. This is often the reality many trainees are facing in the beginning of their training. One obvious challenge is that of *role change and adjustment*. Coping with such role changes becomes necessary as trainees recommence their student career in the higher education context. Some trainees realize that by adding the student role to other roles, such as a worker, spouse, and parent, they will face certain challenges. A substantial amount of effort in re-planning and re-arranging the daily routine will be required. They may struggle with the balancing act of spending more time and effort on the new and challenging academic career without jeopardizing the other roles they need to maintain in their everyday life. This seems to be especially relevant for trainees with more family and work responsibilities. MY's endeavour in coping with the relationship between her academic work and other aspects of her life, particularly her role as a parent, was a clear illustration in this regard.

Adjusting to the new student role may also call for a *psychological transformation of one's identity*. A majority of the trainees are mature adults with long and rich work histories, they may find it hard to psychologically disassociate themselves from their previous professional identities, and to adopt the new identity of a counsellor trainee. This identity-related challenge is often connected to a general feeling of estrangement and distance to schooling after being away from the university student life for so many years.
Trainees such as GI, JV, SD and MY reported experiencing this feeling during the beginning period of their training. They experienced the need for a new identity, that of being a counsellor trainee. The changes included shifts from being a business CEO (JV), a physician and a rehabilitation specialist (GI), a senior administrator in an art group (MY), a technical engineer and training officer (KM), and an industrial consultant (SD).

This transition can generate and intensify anxiety. However, this identity-change-related "shock" does not necessarily apply to all trainees with regard to the sources and causes of distress. Trainees who have relatively shorter career histories, and have had university student life experiences in North America prior to their counsellor training appear to have fewer problems in this respect. YK and SK were trainees in this category. They did not report conspicuous coping difficulties in continuing their student role in counsellor education, although they did experience other difficulties during this adjustment phase. The role adjustment to the new student identity was also not reported as a problem by BH, even though she was a total stranger to the higher education environment in North America. In addition to her individual attributes, BH benefited from both an extended period of psychological preparation for returning to higher education and her long-time professional experiences in the educational domain. Instead of feeling the shock of role change to a student identity, BH was experiencing culture shock toward the bigger picture of the host culture environment.

Coping with Learning Dynamics

To start a new student career focusing on totally new professional training in a different sociocultural environment entails just the beginning of a rich yet complex
experience. Trainees will encounter a diversity of issues in this career pursuit that reflect a combination of unique adult learning dynamics. Variables of cultural influences and adjustment, life career transition, and individual attributes all come into play in the training process. These variables intermingle and interact, forming the context for a series of learning dynamics. It is especially important to keep in mind, as described in the previous episodes of this story, the significant background of trainees' cross-cultural transition in general, and coping with the English language inadequacy in particular, when this part of the story unfolds.

**Changing thinking.** Pursuing the professional training in counselling psychology means, in many respects, a change of one's way of thinking. For many trainees, this requires a substantial psychological transformation from a "mind-set" they have held many years, to a new thinking system that is very different from the one they were used to in their past career experiences. The nature of such a move compels a profound change from the individuals involved, compounded by the fact that change in this context is much more intricate due to the factor of cross-cultural adjustment. Many trainees feel that it is a daunting task to go out of their "old" habit of thinking and doing things, while "refilling" their mind with new philosophy and action initiatives relevant to the counselling profession. SD and KM found that their professional vocabulary rooted in industrial engineering did not apply well to explaining issues in counselling psychology. Similarly, BH reported that she was having a difficult time "equipping" her mind with counselling knowledge that was very different from her previous education and her way of thinking.

This transformation from one's previous professional mentality to the psychology of
a helping professional often requires not only trainees' willingness and flexibility to accept the change, but their increased awareness of the various facets of the training. For example, GI became aware of the fact that one of the main reasons for the difficulties he was encountering was the gap between his ex-career as a medical doctor and his present career as a counsellor trainee. These two professions, as observed by GI, appeared to take very different approaches in practice, even though they share the common goal of promoting the well-being of humanity. As a medical doctor, GI had possessed a "simple and factual" manner in communication, narrowing things down to a diagnosis from symptoms. In contrast, as a counsellor trainee, GI realized that he needed "more avenues to approach a clinical problem." Instead of narrowing things down to come up with a simple answer, he needed "to open up things, expand things, and find more ways of doing things," and "to listen to many things in a person's life, and make many hypotheses based on what has been said".

**Encountering Writing Obstacles.** Parallel to the influence from their previous career background, trainees are often confronted with issues developing from their unique experiences of cross-cultural adjustment including overcoming barriers in utilizing English language in their training. Some trainees, such as GI, JV, and SD, reported experiencing a substantial amount of difficulty in dealing with written assignments in their studies. Although MY had done paper assignments in her Master’s degree studies in art administration, she was very uncertain about her writing capacity for counselling classes until she obtained positive feedback on her written assignments. Such difficulty and uncertainty may be induced by both trainees' unfamiliarity with the academic requirements
associated with the counselling discipline (e.g., APA-Style) and their struggle with the usage of the English language.

**Adjusting to the Clinical Training.** While language proficiency and "mind change" necessitated by entering the counselling discipline affect trainees' level of performance, the bearing of one's cultural background can also be felt during the counselling process. A common challenge is dealing with the "human aspects" of the training. Some trainees find it extremely difficult to be fully engaged in this type of skill training in the beginning, especially when they are in the role of a client in simulation exercises focusing on learning and practising basic counselling skills. KM felt a sense of uneasiness in this situation, especially during the beginning period of his training. He had not been used to this type of personal sharing. SK also felt very uncomfortable to share her feelings with someone she really did not know that well.

Culturally-oriented perceptions and experiences could be the main reasons for these trainees' feelings of anxiety toward personal sharing in the skill-training context. However, other trainees gave quite a different rationale for their anxiety in the same kind of training context. YK attributed her discomfort to her self-perceived deficiency in English, and some other experiences that reinforced this deficiency. MY, on the other hand, thought that English proficiency was not an issue for her. She believed that her feelings of uncertainty and doubt were a reflection of an over-sensitive personality which often lowered her self-confidence.

Some trainees did not feel anxiety and discomfort with this aspect of the training and instead, held a positive view toward the experience. Despite his initial anxiety in "being
judged" by others, JV reported that he was for the most part excited by the experience, and felt "at home doing counselling with a real client" in the skill training sessions. Likewise, BH, SD and GI indicated that such "hands-on" training, e.g., basic skill learning, clinic, and practicum, was the most rewarding part of their training experience.

Adapting to the New Learning Format. The general frame of interactive teaching and learning seems to be another challenge for many trainees who are used to a more classical learning format of "professor-talking plus students-listening". The university systems in their home countries did not expect or encourage students to be active participants but rather to be listeners and "knowledge receivers" who follow the instructions given by their professors. The students' main responsibility in this type of hierarchical learning structure is to digest the lecture notes based on what their professors have to say on issues. As indicated by SK, YK, MY, and GI, they were never encouraged to express what they think, and how they feel about issues in the classroom setting. If questions were asked, the intention was usually to seek more information and clarification, not to debate, disagree, or even challenge what was said by the professor. For trainees who attended universities in the United States and England, such as in the cases of YK, MY, and SD, this type of "lecture-listening" style was still the dominant learning format they had experienced, especially in undergraduate studies.

Given this type of "up-down" one-way communication, trainees usually feel very uncomfortable and bewildered when they face the requirement of class participation in counsellor training. GI's feeling toward class participation appeared to be representative. He felt "discouraged" by the emphasis given to participation as part of the evaluation
The self-perceived language incompetence is certainly a critical roadblock. Given the situation it is not surprising that many trainees felt uncomfortable in participatory activities such as class discussions, presentations, and other group activities. SK, YK, KM and GI indicated that the most difficult part was really not that they did not have good ideas, but rather, how to translate and articulate their thoughts into accurate expressions in English, especially in front of their colleagues in the classroom setting. Moreover, trainees’ culturally-embedded values and habits may have a significant impact on their willingness to participate. A very typical example may be the virtue of being humble. According to the cultural norms of many trainees, speaking less and listening more, especially in an educational environment is a gesture to show virtues such as respect to others, and humility. They feel reluctant to interrupt when others are talking, as they perceive such a move might be impolite to others, especially their professors. These "good-virtues", as such, seem not to be relevant in this learning context. The more courtesy they tried to extend to others, the fewer chances they got to share what they wanted to say. The situation became worse if there were a few very "self-focused", individualistic, and talkative trainees in their classes. According to YK, KM, and GI, situations like this could become very frustrating.

Trainees’ perspectives and adjustment to the distinctive learning dynamics varied. Some felt more comfortable and confident in participating in class activities while others were slower to adjust. KM and SK noticed the gradual increase of their comfort in class participation as the training proceeded, while YK and GI did not appear to have enjoyed the same level of progress in this regard. MY tended to take a more philosophical stance on the
issue, observing not only the disadvantages, but also the advantages of the matter. As a result, she felt both the challenge and enjoyment about the pressure to participate actively in the classroom setting. She regarded the open sharing process in class as a good way to stimulate thinking and to learn. BH and SD reported having no problems in being forthright and active in integrating themselves into the participatory learning environment. According to these trainees, factors such as their previous professional experiences, age maturity, and more flexible personal style might have contributed positively to their smooth transition.

Preferring A Positive Learning Climate. A positive and supportive training environment appears to be of crucial importance to trainees' healthy adaptation to their unique professional learning experience in a cross-cultural context. To experience a constructive relationship with fellow trainees in general, and with professors and/or supervisors in particular, significantly facilitates trainees coping with issues emerging from the training process. Otherwise, trainees may feel isolated, discouraged and negative about their learning experiences.

Most of the trainees reported that they have enjoyed a good and collegial relationship with fellow trainees, while receiving very strong support from professors. YK reported that a majority of the professors were "very friendly and accessible"; JV described his relationship with professors and fellow students as "a wonderful experience"; BH felt that all the professors she met were supportive, while some of them were "extremely supportive"; MY felt that the entire learning climate had a "people-oriented culture", and she received considerable encouragement and support from student colleagues and professors. SD, KM, and SK shared very similar experiences in this regard. The
experiences were not all positive, however, and some negative examples were also provided. MY reported that she felt a bit discouraged when she was not able to get the assistance she needed from an instructor in one course. JV was not impressed when he observed that an instructor showed an obvious lack of interest in teaching. YK, JV, and GI revealed experiences of being hurt by comments from the professors/instructors in the classroom setting and in private meetings regarding training issues. YK also noticed that some of her fellow trainees were not friendly in some classes, especially in the guidance diploma level courses. On a few occasions, she reported having experienced some animosity from fellow students. Nonetheless, most of the trainees pointed out that such negative experiences were isolated incidents that did not affect their overall positive impression about the training program.

Possible Reasons Behind the Hindrances. Some trainees assumed that there might be several possible causes for the occurrence of these negative incidents. Their reasons included (a) a miscommunication between a professor/instructor and a trainee, (b) a lack of cross-cultural sensitivity and interest from some instructors and fellow students, and (c) an issue of personal style in relating to one another. YK and BH felt that cross-cultural awareness and interest from other people, especially from professors and instructors may be the central issue here. In contrast, trainees such as KM, JV, and GI perceived that culture does not play such an essential function. Rather, individual style is a key factor. As SK noted, her comfort level in the training "depends very much on each professors's teaching style."
Factors Facilitating the Training Experience. A training environment that is *culturally open-minded and responsive to trainees’ needs* is indispensable to foster a facilitative training and learning climate. Some trainees wished to have seen more effort toward this end by the training program. That is, not only did the training process adopt a general open and tolerate attitude toward trainees from non-Western cultures, but it would take trainees’ situations into consideration, and employ teaching and training methods which would be particularly relevant to improve the learning environment for trainees. Such facilitation may cover a variety of aspects, including an increased awareness and understanding toward cross-cultural and multicultural issues among faculty and teaching personnel. It was suggested that more culturally-sensitive and effective training aids might be utilized.

An important aspect of *good communication* is to clarify the rationale and logic for training expectations. GI provided one example when a professor’s demand for the training assignment was reasonable and fair, and he could live comfortably with the professor’s feedback and expectations. *To show genuine concern* towards the trainees’ special needs in coping with learning procedures was also important. BH expressed her anxiety over an extremely intensive course load, and SD found it helpful when professors really considered the workload of their students. SD also felt that it was facilitative for his learning if professors would accommodate the trainees’ needs for note-taking in the classroom, perhaps providing an outline of the overheads. By having more preliminary information he could focus more on listening to the lectures. Other facilitative factors focused on *developing a clear organization* in the course, *inviting NWC trainees to participate*, limiting the class
time of the talkative and "self-centered" students; and giving constructive, encouraging, and concrete feedback regarding trainees’ performance.

Diverse Views on Performance Evaluation. Trainees had different perspectives concerning the role and function of performance evaluation. SK, YK, BH, and KM, were very concerned about the level of evaluation they would receive from their professors and supervisors. These trainees regarded their grades as indicators of academic and professional competence. While recognizing the fact that good grades are important, trainees such as MY, GI and SD tended to give more focus to learning something from the training experience. As GI pointed out, "I didn’t care much about what kind of marks I would get; I cared about my real counselling skills much more than the grades I got from individual courses."

Self Motivation. In order to learn more and learn better, trainees were highly motivated throughout their training process. A common factor for all trainees was to stick with a hard-working attitude, devoting their best effort to the task at hand. JV’s and BH’s action of "immersing" themselves into their studying and training appeared to be a standard approach. JV indicated that he worked "five times" as hard as other students, SD voluntarily took extra courses, KM joined a study group outside the classroom setting. These examples demonstrate the trainees’ proactive and agentic endeavour in making things happen, and in improving their situation.

Influences of Individual Contexts. Trainees who are in the position of a voluntary transition, such as in the cases of JV and SD, seem to experience a lower sense of anxiety. As a result, JV and SD reported to have focused more on the positive and enjoyable aspects
of their training. MY, SD, and BH also experienced less anxiety, and were more comfortable and skilful in meeting some of the supposedly challenging training demands like class participation. For this group, prior professional experiences seem to be the primary reasons for the more positive feelings.

Individual attributes may also affect one’s style and quality of coping. For example, BH’s sense of humour, JV’s deep sense of humility, and SD’s easy-going and open communication manner, were reported to have assisted their adjustment in the training environment. Similarly, KM reported that his ability to look at both the pros and cons of his training experience had a constructive effect on how he felt about the English language barriers he encountered. With this perspective, KM found that his disadvantage in language communication could sometimes be turned into an advantage for him. When encountering a client in a training session, KM found himself to be more empathic and a patient listener who focused more on clarifying the meanings of his client’s expressions before jumping quickly into incorrect interpretations and conclusions which might make the client feel uncomfortable.

Facing Other Concerns

Some other individual issues also surface in trainees’ student career. These concerns very often can have a noticeable impact on trainees’ adjustment and the coping process.

Financial Concerns. The availability of financial resources is certainly one of the major concerns. Trainees who had financial resources, such as in the cases of JV, SD, and KM, were usually better off in terms of feeling less pressure, and being able to concentrate their time and energy on their studying and training. Other trainees had to devote more time
and energy to their financial needs. For example, although her husband had a steady income to support the family, MY kept her part-time jobs as a supplementary financial resource for her family and herself.

Trainees who come to Canada as international students seem to have more concerns over financial resources. SK and YK supported themselves for a period of time, but ran into funding difficulty during the middle of their studies. Although they were fortunate enough to obtain some financial support from their parents, they were not feeling comfortable about receiving this support. BH’s scholarship certainly helped her a great deal. However, she had to struggle with the two difficult realities; first, trying to save a little for her family back in her home country due to the loss of her share of the family income, and second, to take the maximum course load possible each semester so that she would finish her degree within the two-year period when the funding was available. Coping with these two aspects, especially the latter, brought extra anxiety for BH. She felt that she was very often overwhelmed by the workload she faced, rushing through with little chance to digest the course content.

Family Concerns. One’s family life appears to be another major concern. Nearly all the trainees described how important it was for support (including psychological and financial aid) from their parents, spouses, and children. Family support made it possible for trainees to continue their effort in driving hard for their new career goals. This truth may also be illustrated by trainees’ experiences on the other side of the same coin. That is, trainees can easily feel the interference, distraction, and discomfort if there emerges difficulties associated with their family life. This takes the form of homesickness, the
distress and/or poor health of family members, and difficult family relationships. There are many examples as such. YK’s negative feeling in the beginning of the training was intensified by thinking about her father’s difficult adjustment to his retirement. BH felt very distracted and emotionally drained when she was working with youth in her clinical training. This training experience repeatedly reminded her of her own children who needed her love and care, yet were far away in her home country. According to BH, the temporarily separation from her family, and the missing of the direct support from her immediate family was very difficult for her, and this reality created a sense of loneliness and anxiety. GI’s difficult experience regarding family, however, occurred in a very different context. His failing marriage obviously consumed a lot of his time and energy, and as a result, he had to take one year leave of absence before he managed to put his personal life back together, and resume his normal training effort.

Growing in the Process

Enhancing Self-awareness. Being involved in counsellor training induces a combination of rich yet challenging experiences. To reflect on what they have been going through, trainees are very philosophical and self-conscious, trying to put things into perspective. The first and foremost positive feeling shared by all the trainees was the eye-opening experience of engaging in a journey of in-depth personal exploration. All the trainees agreed that it was a profound experience of self-understanding that they had never previously encountered. Even trainees who had experienced more hardships in this process would acknowledge the extraordinary value this personal exploration journey had brought to their personal lives. YK, for example, admitted that from time to time she felt that she
"suffered a lot" in tumbling through the training process. However, it was still a worthwhile invaluable experience as the self-knowledge and self-awareness she gained in her two-year training exceeded those she had acquired in her "entire life".

For many trainees this has been a soul-searching experience that is truly touching, powerful, and most of all, meaningful to their individual well-being. The legacy of such a meaning-making voyage goes far beyond the face value of making a career change in one's life. It has an integral impact on increasing trainees' capacity in coping with varied self-related dynamics in life. For example, SD reported that this process had helped him to cope better with distress and discomforts in daily life. GI, KM, and SK reported that their self-confidence was strengthened due to this learning experience. KM mentioned that the experience had made him "much more open" in acknowledging his internal emotion, and sharing it with others, even though such experience may sometimes leave him with a sense of anxiety and discomfort. Using the example of role-playing in simulation counselling exercises, KM said,

"it was the first time in my life to talk about what I had experienced, and to get in touch with my true face. It was so reflective that I was reconstructing myself, and at the same time, making me a more open and understandable person to myself."

Gaining Interpersonal Skills. Parallel to a sense of personal growth, trainees also benefited from the knowledge and skills they obtained during the training process. Perhaps the biggest was in the enhancement of interpersonal communication skills. Trainees reported that they have become much more competent in interacting with others in various contexts such as family, the workplace, and other social environments. They noticed that
they have become better listeners, and are more patient, sensitive, and understanding of other people's problems. SK noticed a trend toward becoming "people-oriented". BH, GI, and SD reported an increase of empathy in interpersonal relationships and in their interaction with others. For many trainees, the skills are useful not only in the counselling profession, but also in the broader picture of their prospective life career development. Trainees who had successfully completed their training and entered the world of work, such as JV and SK, reinforced these perspectives. An essential merit of such skills, as YK pointed out, may be the "transferable" quality that makes these skills applicable to various social interactions and contexts.

Reflecting and Envisioning. A key and vital component in the personal growing experience for trainees' was their projection of their expected career development. Most trainees believed that the learning experience had definitely kindled their awareness of issues related to the life career direction they were going. They appeared to hold a general sense of optimism when envisioning their future career options. Some described more specific plans. For example, SD's goal was to become a competent practitioner who would be constantly involved in professionally-oriented life-long learning activities so that the counselling career could give him a sense of satisfaction and meaning in life. Both SK and BH saw the possibility to go further in counsellor training in Canada. Others provided a more general and open outlook in terms of their prospective alternatives. MY found that the more she was involved in counsellor training, the more open and flexible she had become regarding her career choices. Her intention was to go with the flow of self-exploration initiated by her counsellor training, and go for a career that would be "meaningful",
"challenging" and "interesting" to her individual needs. Although stating an open attitude concerning their career development, GI, KM and YK articulated several preferences within the domains of counselling and education.

A few trainees experienced some pessimistic or negative feelings when reflecting on the training experience. Although acknowledging the meaningfulness and worthiness of her student career in counselling psychology, YK felt that she was unfairly penalized because of her barriers in verbal communication. The most disappointing result was that it distracted her concentration on skill-training, and hampered her ability to assess her real competency in counselling situations. She felt that she could have done a much better job if she had taken the same kind of training her own language. JV experienced a sense of loss and disillusionment at times, including feelings of financial loss over his training years, estrangement in some relationships, and some discouragement of anticipated career opportunities.

Summary

The above description tells a general story of eight individuals from non-Western cultures who are engaged in a new career pursuit, i.e., counsellor training, in a Canadian university. Plots reflected in this story are relevant to these particular NWC counsellor trainees' experiences, but may also pertain to the experiences of others.

The beginning part of the story illustrates that before coming to Canada, trainees' yearning for change in life may lead them to consider the option of going abroad. Having defined their options, trainees come to the decision to either immigrate to, or study in Canada. They then take concrete action to implement their plans.
The middle part of the story depicts trainees' initial adjustment experiences once they have come to Canada. Most of them face various issues in adapting themselves to the sociocultural environment of the host country; they work hard in their search for a right direction for their life career development in the new environment. With persistent effort, they finally realize that going into counsellor training appears to be a viable career path, and they decide to go for this career option.

The story concludes with a detailed delineation of their engagement in their new career pursuit of professional training in counselling psychology and counsellor education. A series of major issues faced by the trainees are explained. These include problems trainees encounter at the onset of their training, how they deal with English language difficulty, their efforts in adjusting to the new educational system, and how they cope with various dynamics in the training process. During the training program trainees may have to cope with other issues such as family and financial concerns. These issues are intertwined with their academic and professional training. The trainees also provide reflections on how they see their career project for the future.

Epilogue

This general narrative is based upon the experiences reported by eight counsellor trainees from non-Western cultures. Although there is an conspicuous effort to include in the narrative as many relevant aspects as possible from each individual story told in the previous chapter, it does not attempt to cover all the viewpoints and facets surfaced in the individual stories. Rather, the main intent of the general narrative is to focus on issues, observations, understandings, meanings, and reflections that are more commonly shared by
individual stories told from similar as well as diverse angles.

It is possible that a general narrative as such may be organized in different ways and styles. Also, other specific plots or stories may unfold if NWC trainees with different background experiences or training contexts would have a chance to tell what they have experienced. With these prudence and considerations in mind, this general narrative appears to provide a reasonably accurate portrayal of this group of counsellor trainees from non-Western cultures.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

In this study 8 informants were interviewed by the researcher. The research results were presented through a two-phase procedure. First, 8 individual stories were written about the experiences of these 8 participants who were counsellor trainees from non-Western cultures (NWC). The individual stories provided contexts for varied experiences and perspectives of NWC counsellor trainees during their life career transition process. The experiences and viewpoints not only depicted individual characteristics and circumstances in each story, but also informed the organization and development of a general narrative which represented the final product of this research. Second, grounded on the key themes synthesized from the 8 individual stories, the general narrative aimed at constructing a broader portrayal of NWC counsellor trainees’ experiences. It explored associated meanings, and offered some insights to better understand these experiences.

Becoming engaged in counsellor training was not an event, but rather a process over time which often started when the NWC trainees seriously considered the need for change in their lives. They defined their options, and decided to either immigrate to, or study in Canada. They then took concrete action to implement their plans.

The NWC trainees endeavoured to make their initial adjustment after coming to Canada. Most of them coped with various issues and challenges in adapting to the sociocultural environment of the host country, while searching for the best direction for their life career development. They finally realized that going into counsellor training appeared to be a viable career path and pursued this new career option.
The concluding part of the narrative described the NWC trainees' engagement in professional training in counselling psychology and counsellor education. The trainees were committed to this new career goal, aiming at graduate level training. They dealt with a series of emerging issues and challenges including English language difficulty, adjustment to the new educational system, and other dynamics in the training process. The trainees also had to cope with other issues such as family and financial concerns. These issues interacted with their academic and professional training. Having gained a sense of personal growth, the trainees found their involvement in counselling training both challenging and inspiring. Not only did it provide them with a deep experience of self-exploration and self-understanding, but it also helped them project their future career plans.

Limitations of the Study

This study presented some major aspects relevant to reflect the flow of the life career transition experiences of the 8 NWC counsellor trainees. As the study focused mainly on describing and understanding the unique personal experiences of the 8 participants, it was limited in scope with respect to its generalizability. The degree to which these stories described and interpreted the transition process manifests an open-ended venue, and thus invites more exploration and inquiry. Further research is recommended to expand, support, review, and refine the information revealed.

The study was also limited by the source of participants. All 8 informants were recruited from a university counselling psychology program in a large western Canadian city. While this same training environment was helpful for comparing and analyzing the trainees' experiences within this group, how representative this training context is to other
training contexts in counsellor training, remains to be established.

Another limitation focused on participants’ propensity to share. Along with factors such as participants’ self-awareness, biases, level of openness, and ability to articulate, their priority varied in terms of contributing what they felt was more important to shape their individual stories. For instance, some devoted more time to elaborate their prior life career experiences and/or their initial adjustment experiences, while others emphasized their feelings during the counsellor training process.

A further limitation was the researcher’s viewpoints and position. To minimize such biases, each participant was invited to verify his/her personal story, and the research supervisor also reviewed the narratives. While this process of validation, revision, and refinement helped to reduce some biases, the researcher’s personal relationship with, and influence in, the study was always an existing reality that deserved attention. My personal attributes such as experiences, interest, intention, and perspectives, were always an important part accompanying and affecting the research process. This issue was addressed in details in Chapter Three (i.e., Research Methodology) of this dissertation.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study appears to respond and inform the 3 categories of literature reviewed in chapter 2 of this dissertation. It supports substantially the career development theories. While it offers general support for factors involved in transition to higher education and cross-cultural adjustment, it suggests some precautions and considerations in examining the complexity of such issues.
Career Development

The present study supported the 3 broadly-defined theoretical perspectives of career development, i.e., career as life process, career as individual agency, and career as meaning making.

The sequential flow within all the narratives present clearly career as a life process. One's career experiences always co-exist with life experiences. In this sense, career is life, and vice versa. The participants' experiences from the beginning (e.g., desire for change before coming to Canada) to the end (e.g., engagement in counsellor training in Canada) demonstrated the developmental nature of career as postulated by Super (1990), Ginzberg (1984), and others (Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951; Sharf, 1997; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). These NWC trainees assumed a variety of roles (parent, spouse, worker, and child) and encountered and coped with dynamics that are commonly faced by individuals in their life career transition (Herr, Amundson, & Borgen, 1990; Hopson & Adams, 1977; Schlossberg, 1984, 1987; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

An essential component that regulated this transitional experience was a remarkable sense of individual agency (Amundson, 1995a, 1995b; Cochran, 1990; Cochran & Laub, 1994; Collin & Young, 1986; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). The NWC trainees were active agents who took ownership of their lives, designed their life career blueprint, and took concrete actions to implement their plans. Their agentic endeavour was not built on an ideal without an infrastructure, but rather, was grounded on the intrapersonal resources of selfhood that enabled them to envision their future, weigh options, make decisions, and take actions.
The first and foremost resource was their high level of self-awareness (Gottfredson, 1996; Miller-Tiedeman & Tiedeman, 1982, 1990; Super, 1981; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). What intertwined with, and ran parallel to, the self-awareness, was the NWC trainees' sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986; Betz, 1992; Betz & Hackett, 1981; Lent & Brown, 1986; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). These two major facets of "the self" interplayed with a series of other environmental factors, assisting the NWC trainees to keep focused on their agentic quest. Through the transition process, themes of self-awareness and self-efficacy emerged repeatedly. Experiences such as feeling the need to open up a new career exploration, becoming aware of their growing personal interest in working with people, seeing their personal potential and limitations in counsellor training, and reflecting on their growing experiences through the process, were clear illustrations of how self-awareness and self-efficacy actively functioned to enhance the NWC trainees' sense and behaviour of human agency.

This individual agency, or human action to make things happen, can never take place in a vacuum, but always occurs in a certain sociocultural context. The NWC trainees' experience was no exception. The career actions were always conscious, intentional, and purposeful, manifesting the very nature of meaning making in their life career development (Collin & Young, 1988, 1992; Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996). Following a flow of human narratives, the NWC trainees made constant efforts in making sense of events and experiences occurring during this developmental process. Meaning interpretation and meaning exploration became a common phenomenon accompanying their journey. For example, the pursuit of counsellor training became a meaningful career calling after they
gained a better understanding of their growing desire for working with, and helping, other people. Also, the trainees savoured their training experiences, whether enjoyment or challenges, in a philosophical manner, and they put things into perspective when making their reflection. All the trainees reported a significant feeling of personal growth during the training process. Such awareness and perceptions manifested a clear outcome of meaning-exploration and meaning-making grounded on the purposeful interaction between these individuals and their particular life career contexts during this period of time. The whole experience, thus, went above and beyond the observable phenomena and behaviour; it demonstrated how these NWC trainees took intentional actions to construct a new career path, or in Cochran's (1990) terms, actualizing their sense of vocation.

Transition to Higher Education

The present study generally echoed the 3 major constructs that compose the transition of adult learners' lives when they return to universities for continuing education. The NWC trainees were a very special group of adult returning students with unique background experiences and needs. Nonetheless, they appeared to go through a generally parallel transition experience to their fellow students/trainees in the host country culture. The majority of the NWC trainees reported their endeavour in coping with the challenge of role-change. This endeavour of disengaging from their prior professional roles and adapting to their student roles in a new higher education context, illustrated a process of identity negotiation (Amundson, 1994; Chen, 1997; Fassinger & Schlossberg, 1992; Gianakos, 1996; Low, 1996; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Vickio, 1990).
Also, having a sense of social connectedness (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1995; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989), and other social support (Cosden & McNamara, 1997; Haramandaris & Power, 1997; Panori & Wong, 1995), was confirmed as a critical coping resource for the NWC trainees. A positive and supportive learning and training environment in which they could enjoy a collegial relationship with fellow trainees, and receive the understanding and support from professors and instructors, was important for their transition. It was particularly worth noting that the trainees’ relationship with significant others, especially their immediate families, also had an impact on the coping process (Amundson, 1995a; Arthur & Hiebert, 1996; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992a; Oswalt & Finkelberg, 1995).

With respect to academic competence, this study confirmed the importance of key intrapersonal variables such as the NWC trainees’ self-concept, self-efficacy, and inner motivation in their learning process. Parallel to the general inclination to meaning making among many adult learners, the NWC trainees connected their academic competence more closely to their prior and anticipated career experiences (Cleave-Hogg, 1996). Meanwhile, evaluations on their academic performance became a contextual factor that could either facilitate or hinder their level of attainment and confidence.

Cross-cultural Adjustment

While offering some support for the common factors affecting NWC students’ cross-cultural adjustment in colleges and universities in North America, this study rendered diverse evidence and connotations that may inform, and expand the existing body of literature.
A key roadblock for the NWC counsellor trainees was the difficulty of using English as their second language. Language difficulty could be a challenge not only for trainees who were lacking of English proficiency, but also for those who were more knowledgable and skillful in using English. For example, speaking accent and limited vocabulary could become barriers in oral communication. Second, prior living and studying experiences in an English-speaking Western country could considerably reduce one’s feeling of language inadequacy. Third, individuals’ self-perception and coping behaviour, especially their self-perceived language competence, could have significant impact on their reaction to language difficulty. Those trainees who were more optimistic about their coping might feel less frustrated with overcoming language barriers, and vice versa. Fourth, neither anticipated nor experienced language difficulty became a deterrent that threatened the NWC trainees’ resolution to pursue this language-intensive professional training, an indication of a high sense of motivation and personal agency among these trainees.

The study partly supported the claim that performance expectation could be a key psychological factor in NWC students’ coping. Although the trainees all had a high hope for academic achievement, their criteria and expectations varied. For some, the actual grade evaluation was very important as it was considered an indication of one’s academic and professional competence. Others paid more attention to the knowledge and skills they felt that they had gained from the training experience.

There was support for the related phenomenon that performance-expectation-associated experience such as feedback from the professor/supervisor, could either positively or negatively influence the trainees’ feelings, especially self-confidence. However, the
performance-expectation only had very limited connection with one's family and other significant social relationships. Most trainees wanted to achieve better performance because of their inner motivation and sense of vocation. The pressure of "not disappointing others" surfaced only under certain circumstances such as when some trainees had to receive direct financial aid from their families.

The current study provided sufficient evidence showing that adjusting to the training system remained a central factor in the NWC trainees' coping experience. The study echoed findings in the literature in which the core issue appeared to be twofold. First, deal with the new values in the host country. Second, adapt to the new ways of doing things that are consistent with these values and other sociocultural norms. Some of the major coping dynamics were as follows: increased self-exploration in training, student participation in class, and a more informal and less hierarchical learning structure.

The study supported the important function of social connectedness in the NWC trainees' coping process. The trainees made better adjustment both in their training and other aspects of personal lives while they were making new friends and establishing other social contacts in the new environment. One phenomenon that was not explored extensively in the literature, yet worth noting in this study, was the NWC trainees' endeavour in building a social network in the new environment. Such effort could be quite intentional, substantial, and effective in the trainees' adjustment experience.

While my study offered general support for the vital importance of financial resources in one's adjustment process, it yielded several other indications for consideration. First, financial concern was not a relevant issue for some trainees, and this definitely
assisted their coping process. Second, those trainees with international student status could be more vulnerable to financial concerns, especially during the middle of their training. Third, the trainees who were new immigrants were more likely to be engaged in tentative employment when they first came to the host country. They would usually start their new academic and professional training after they felt that they were financially more stable and prepared, or in one participant’s words, after they had "a sense of financial security."

The current study did not support the claim that racial discrimination and prejudice were highly visible in higher education institutions in North America. Some trainees reported negative incidents in their training experience. Others suggested that there may be a need to increase people’s cross-cultural and multicultural sensitivity in the training environment, and the training system may be improved to become more facilitative to NWC trainees’ needs. However, no one felt that he or she experienced explicit discrimination and prejudice in this training context. On the contrary, the NWC trainees’ confirmed their positive impression and feelings about a generally supportive and friendly climate in the learning environment.

Other Critical Considerations

The existing body of literature, especially the key constructs and tenets from the career development theories appear to have helped synthesizing and explaining the main themes arising from the research participants’ narration of their lived experiences. While this approach provides a range of more organized and rational representations, it lacks the capacity to capture the wholeness of a lived experience described by a story. That is, categories and factors as such can only become alive and meaningful when they are
connected to two key variables: the person, and his/her particular context. An example was the commonly shared feeling among participants that they had experienced a tremendous increase of self-awareness. The construct "self-awareness" refers to a variety of situations that were defined by each individual as significant and meaningful in his/her experience. For some, it meant that they had understood themselves better than before, and gained a more clear vision for their future direction. For others, it meant an improved competence in interpersonal relationships. Without an understanding of these experiences in their particular contexts, constructs such as "self-awareness" become meaningless. Therefore, it is advisable that the outlined narrative themes be perceived in an open, dynamic, and situational manner. In other words, the individual experiences and their associated meanings are better comprehended within the holistic and coherent narrative flow.

A related problem with a factor or category is its perceived ability to generalize. There is no doubt that a factor often reveals some regularity or commonality in human actions, and hence it can provide help for understanding human experiences. However, this does not necessarily warrant a generalization to individuals who seem to be facing similar circumstances. Thinking and feelings may vary substantially from individual to individual, reflecting diverse and dynamic experiences. For example, English language in oral communication was an obvious roadblock for many, but was not regarded as such by a few of the trainees. Similarly, the approach to financial concerns varied widely.

In both of the above examples, a simple description of the factors of "language difficulty" and "financial concern" without contextual explanations could be misleading. A holistic description of personalized contexts and their associated experiences was thus, more
desirable. The narrative format seemed to be well suited to this purpose. Rather than focusing on uniformity, the general narrative presented an integral picture of how individuals acted or reacted to these related factors in a manner that was consistent with their specific personal contexts and meanings. This echoes one of the key intentions in ethnographic research, that is, describe and make sense of experiences within their contexts. From this research philosophy, the central aim of reviewing theoretical constructs and factors was to aid contextual explanations rather than to generalize what people had experienced. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) have pointed out, to better understand human action and its associated meanings through inquiries in social sciences, "the only generalization is: there is no generalization" (p. 110).

**Implications for Practice**

The first and foremost important connotation from the study is that in order to take care of the personal well-being of NWC trainees, more attention needs to be directed to a comprehensive helping approach addressing both psychological and tangible needs. This premise forms the rational cornerstone and philosophical foundation from which several implications may flow.

Building a positive and supportive learning climate is of primary importance for facilitating the psychological needs of NWC trainees. The formation of this type of favourable climate depends on the practical efforts from all parties involved in the process, i.e., the university authority and leadership, supporting and service personnel, faculty/teaching staff, fellow students, and the NWC trainees themselves. A fundamental beginning point is the need for an increased level of education on the issue of cross-cultural
sensitivity and awareness. Other practical steps toward building an optimal learning climate are deemed to be difficult or even impossible without this attitudinal precondition.

This sensitivity can help the university system as well as people working and studying in the system foster a more open mind toward a multicultural education reality. This open and positive attitude may include aspects such as a sense of respect for different values, a willingness to understand and to learn, and a genuine concern for people with different values and from different cultural backgrounds. While this kind of positive climate is assumed to be beneficial to the general NWC student population on campus, NWC counsellor trainees will particularly benefit from such a learning environment because of the intensive nature of interpersonal communications in counsellor education.

The positive climate can improve the practical services on campus so that they may become more accessible, relevant, and effective to NWC students who need help. The timely assistance BH received from the university housing services office was a good illustration. Other special services currently available to NWC students such as various services through the international student office (i.e., the International House of UBC), are also an appropriate vehicle for the same support. An area that needs much more attention appears to be the domain of teaching and learning, as this is where the most frequent activities of academic contact happen. Building a positive climate in the classroom setting is of critical significance. As mentioned earlier, this is particularly necessary to small, communication-intensive, and experiential-learning-oriented professional training environments such as counsellor education/training classes.

In forming a positive climate in counsellor training, it is necessary to build rapport
between NWC trainees and their fellow trainees, especially those from the main stream culture in the host country. Without this rapport, some NWC trainees may be more vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation. They might feel that they neither matter, nor are connected to the academic environment. A tolerant, friendly, and collegial relationship with their fellow students can help NWC trainees open themselves up more easily and feel accepted, comfortable, and confident in integrating themselves into the system.

Meanwhile, the NWC trainees may need to be encouraged to become more proactive in their interaction with their colleagues. While recognizing their cultural identities, they may need to learn some new social competencies. The NWC trainees’ self-motivation, self-awareness, and self-preparation and willingness for change, are critical variables in this adjustment process. Administrators, academic advisors, faculty and teaching stuff, the student association, and fellow students, can all have a positive influence in facilitating this learning. Without a strong sense of personal agency, the environmental conditions alone may not be sufficient to affect a smooth and positive adjustment.

The other key consideration is the pivotal role and function of teaching personnel and training staff. Instructors and trainers can have a vital impact on fostering a positive and welcoming learning environment that has the most immediate, frequent, and direct impact on NWC counsellor trainees. With an open attitude and an increased interest in multicultural issues, instructors and supervisors may acquire knowledge and skills which would facilitate the special learning needs of NWC trainees.

Several implications for a more effective teaching and training approach for NWC counsellor trainees may be worth noting. First, have a genuine sense of caring and empathy
for NWC trainees. This will lay the groundwork for a trustful relationship between the trainer and his/her trainees. Once the trainees can experience the trust and care, many other issues occurring in the training process would be dealt with more easily through ingenuous communication, sharing, and understanding between the instructor and the trainees.

Second, avoid failure of communication. In clarifying the rationale and logic for training expectations, or in giving instructions/supervision during the training process, it is always important to help NWC trainees understand what has been said. Under these circumstances, the instructor/supervisor may often need to spend more time and effort in assisting NWC trainees to clearly comprehend the messages communicated. Instructors may need to be more culturally sensitive in the communication process so that comments that could be perceived by the trainees as negative would be avoided, or at least, minimized.

A third implication is that the instructor’s feedback to NWC trainees should be framed in a constructive, encouraging, and concrete manner. Not only does such feedback provide them with specific areas for improvement, it also serves as a strong motivating factor. Aiming at a win/win situation of enhancing both the trainees’ professional skills and psychological well-being, feedback as such would promote the trainees’ motivation, strengthen their self-confidence, escalate their interest, and broaden their scope to learn more, and learn better.

Continuing with this constructive training path, the fourth implication is to find, refine, and utilize more effective training and teaching methodology which may be appealing and suitable to the special needs of NWC counsellor trainees. A clear, consistent, and simple organization of course materials, accommodating the trainees’ needs for note-taking
in the classroom, inviting NWC trainees to participate, and being considerate of the trainees capacity for the workload and digestion, are just some of the examples in this regard.

A final implication for counsellor educators in the front line is that they should keep an open and flexible mind while teaching and supervising NWC trainees. A simple rule of thumb to follow may be to remain situational and contextual. Counsellor educators should not take their existing knowledge for granted. This includes knowledge about NWC trainees. There is diversity and "sub-cultures" within a culture. Individual personal attributes and coping styles, as illustrated in this study, can vary substantially, and affect the outcomes of NWC trainees' thinking, feeling, and behaviour. There is no standardized "more effective" or "better" training formula for all NWC trainees. As a result, facilitation may need to be more constructive and relevant on an individual basis within its particular context. Again, to repeat the axiom that completed the previous sub-section of this discussion may be quite pertinent, that is, "the only generalization is: there is no generalization" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.110).

**Implications for Future Research**

The narrative case study methodology following an ethnographic research philosophy appeared to work well for the purposes of this particular study. Focusing on in-depth personal exploration and reflection, the narrative method offers room and liberty for research participants to describe and make sense of their lived experiences through a sharing process. Thus, the process provides the investigation with more vigour of human intention and human action, an approach that facilitates information gathering and meaning making in lived experiences. This type of methodology can be quite applicable to future research
where there are similar research goals.

Second, this study will hopefully generate more interest in the same topic, and/or the under-represented target populations in similar domains. NWC counsellor trainees are a group of NWC professionals whose life career coping experiences in the host country have received little attention. There is a scarcity of information concerning this group’s experiences of transition and adjustment. As counsellor training expands to include more NWC individuals, the need to understand this group’s experiences and perspectives becomes greater than ever. More future research attention to this end will assist to improve the quality of the training system, making it a more accessible and effective system for NWC trainees.

Third, future research may look into the broader applicability and representativeness of evidence presented in this study. Along with similar qualitative research approaches, other methods such as survey research may also be utilized to review the relevance and accuracy of the information gathered in the present study. Additional information will help to validate the current findings. New information will serve to further widen and enrich our understanding of NWC trainees’ experiences.

A fourth implication for future research is the need for studying the experiences of NWC counsellor trainees who enroll in counsellor education programs in different universities. The current study only presented the experiences of those in one Canadian university. An inquiry that covers a range of different counsellor education programs may help to highlight the role of context in general, and person-context interaction in particular.
A fifth implication is that future research may expand to study individuals’ experiences in parallel contexts. For example, it would be interesting to compare the experiences of NWC counsellor trainees with experiences of NWC individuals who are involved in other types of professional training, such as in other areas of mental health training.

A sixth implication for future research is the need to explore more specific teaching and training strategies that facilitate the NWC trainees’ learning experience. The series of facilitating and hindering aspects reported in this study may serve as a good base, upon which a range of alternate training rationale and techniques may be examined, refined, and projected, aiming at building a more supportive, positive, and learner-friendly environment that would better meet the special needs of NWC counsellor trainees.

Finally, further research may also be required to explore the discrepancies and commonalities between the experiences of NWC counsellor trainees and their fellow trainees from the main stream culture. A comparative study as such would provide insights for the enhancement of a comprehensive and efficient training approach, and a collegial and understanding learning environment.
REFERENCES


Erlbaum Associates.


APPENDIX C

THEME QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

I. Beginning: Before Coming to Canada

(1) Could you tell me about your life and work experiences before coming to Canada?
   --Your family: Parents, Brothers and sister: What do they do?
   --Your educational background
   --Your work experience
   --Your interests and hobbies

(2) In general, how would you describe your personal life and career experiences back in your home country? Could you give me some examples?

(3) Why/How did you make the decision to come to Canada?
   --Reason(s) and rationale

(4) What were the things/experiences related to your decision-making process for coming to Canada?
   --Anticipated difficulties?
   --Any preparations?

II. Middle: Initial Adjustment (after Coming to Canada)

(1) What was your main purpose for coming to Canada?
   --Immigration, study, work, etc. ?

(2) Could you describe to me your initial living experiences in Canada?

(3) What did you encounter when you first came to this country?

(4) How did you feel when you initially came to Canada?

(5) How did you cope with changes in life?

(6) What were the difficulties you encountered when you first came here?

(7) What were the things you enjoyed most?
III. Ending: Engagement in Counsellor Training

(1) How did you make the decision to pursue counsellor education in Canada?

(2) What was your purpose for entering counsellor training?

(3) Could you tell me about your experiences in counsellor training?

(4) What happened in your training?

(5) How did you make the transition to the new student life?

(6) How did you feel about the training environment?

(7) What were some of the most important factors that had impact on your training and study?

(8) What were the things you enjoyed most in your training?

(9) What were the major factors that facilitated your learning and training?

(10) What were the most difficult things your encountered during your study/training?

(11) How did you cope with difficult issues emerged from your training?

(12) What was it like to be a counsellor trainee?

(13) In general, how would you describe your experience as a counsellor-trainee?

(14) How would you assess your experience thus far as a counsellor trainee? --Pros and/or Cons, Gains and/or Losses?

(15) What does this experience mean to you in your life career development?